

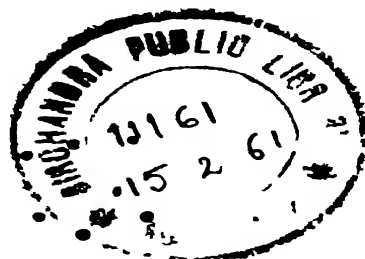
THE NATURAL BENT

THE NATURAL BENT

Lionel Fielden

*But a fool must follow his natural bent
(Even as you and I') •*

KIPLING - THE VAMPIRE



ANDRE DEUTSCH

AUTHOR'S NOTE

DIFFIDENCE SUGGESTS some brief explanation of the origin of this very personal book. Throughout my life I have kept a series of irregular but detailed diaries: they died away when my life seemed humdrum, flowered when it appeared interesting: I suppose that they were the result of an itch to write. Once I showed some of them to a publisher, with the result chronicled on page 279. After that, they lay unregarded for twelve years. Then my friend Alan Moorehead, while staying with me in Italy, showed interest in my description of Gallipoli, and read my scribbles about it. As a result, he wrote his admirable book on that campaign, which he dedicated to me. And I, as a result of that, wondered whether, after all, these notes on my life might be of interest to others. I hope that they may be so.

My thanks are due to Lettice Cooper, Lucy Moorehead and Santha Rama Rau, all of whom took immense trouble in reading the ms and indicating how I could best make the immense cuts required by the exigencies and costs of printing. Without their guidance, the task would have baffled me.

Although I have made many personal deductions from personal experience, this is not a moral tale: its intention is to amuse and entertain, and thus, in my own small coinage, repay a tiny part of the debt I owe to English literature.

L. F.

FOR
LETTICE COOPER
WHO WAS REALLY RESPONSIBLE

*Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my ways and days?*

*No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be:
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two*

T. S. ELIOT - THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK

*'It's a funny business,' my father said at last. 'I don't seem to get any
further with it at all. I wonder if we've taken the wrong track - I wonder
if everyone's always been wrong?'*

C. P. SNOW - THE SLARCH

Chapter One

'EVERY TIME THAT you are naughty,' said Nannie, pinning together on the top of her head the tapes which secured the large white bow under her scraggy chin, 'a jewel falls from your mother's crown in Heaven.' I heard it fall. I saw it drop. Clearly, accusingly, leaned out towards me from the blue sky that fearful dilapidated tiara. My aunt, reading the Bible to me while I guzzled bread-and-milk in bed, said: 'You see, to be a Minister of Christ is the highest calling: or even a missionary of His Gospel.' A missionary, I thought, might do: travel, the cannibalistic pot. Grandmamma, incredibly elegant in silk and lace and diamonds, whispered confidentially: 'You must learn to sit still and not fidget: and also, that *nothing* matters.' At the age of five I was commanded to read the first *Times* leader to her every morning: she told me later that she had found it more intelligible and amusing, and less ponderous, that way. Mitchell, the head gardener, an endearing man with a fine black bushy beard, told me: 'If you stick to gardening, you won't go far wrong in life.' I did not profit by that sage advice.

'If,' said my stepmother, 'you don't eat this nice boiled cabbage for luncheon, you will have it again for tea and then for supper, and, if necessary, for breakfast tomorrow.' Those wet squares of cabbage haunt me still: I cannot think of food except as a kind of medicine. 'Why,' asked the headmaster of my private school, 'can't you be like other boys?' I did not know the answer to that one. He padded around in sneakers, carrying a fives bat, and hoping to catch someone in a delicious *flagrante delicto*. 'I intend,' said my father, 'to engage a tutor for your holidays: he will see that you have a cold bath, and attend the riding school.' Hot baths and no horses became two of my chief aims in life. 'I shall expel you,' said the Headmaster of Eton, 'if you attempt to leave the Officers Training Corps.' I passionately believed him to be wrong, but could not call his bluff. 'If you don't,' said my father in 1914, 'join the Public Schools Battalion tomorrow, I shall cut you off with a shilling.' I did not join. But, three weeks later, white feathers pushed me into the Army.

'This officer,' wrote the General, quite unjustifiably, 'is too young to command a battery.' Demoted to Captain. 'Not the right type for the Diplomatic Service,' noted the Committee at Burlington House. Probably not: still, I had sweated my guts out to pass the Foreign Office examination: many thanks for nothing. 'A brilliant fellow,' wrote Sir Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 'but unreliable.' In spite of that, I am invited by the Italian Government to go to Rome and supervise the records of the Genoa Conference: six pounds a day. I throw it over because the Dutch Government asks me to take a staff of translators and interpreters to the Hague: seven pounds a day. But I am bowled over by Fridjof Nansen, who says I may go with him to Greece and Asia Minor to save refugees: nothing a day. I go. Nansen writes warmly: 'Thank you for all that you have done: I am afraid that our organisation will have to pack up for lack of funds.' Thirty-four nations had contributed thirty-two thousand pounds. Pause, while I think I will be a painter, and live gloriously in Italy on twopence a day: no, it doesn't work. 'Really, Mr Fielden,' says Lord Parmoor, Lord President of the Council, 'I shall have to get another secretary if you are so very casual.' Quite right too: I had had enough of Westminster and a Labour Government to last me for two lifetimes. 'A very fertile brain and a charming person,' wrote Sir John Reith to Margot Oxford, 'but, political judgement - I ask you!' Well now, who would you say has had political judgement, I wonder.

The Home Secretary of the Government of India noted: 'Fielden goes to see Gandhi against my express orders: I think that there is a case for declaring him to be of unsound mind.' Gandhi, chuckling on his *charpoy* and consulting a huge turnip watch, remarked: 'You must leave me now, dear child: but remember that there is no place for a milk-and-water liberal in this armed camp: of course, if you wish to have a job by virtue of the guns behind you, that is your affair.' The Viceroy mumbled over a mammoth silver inkpot: 'We ah verah conscious of yourah woahk and sacrahfahciés, but I amah afrahaid we cannotah . . . extendah your contract.' With relish I replied: 'If ah haveah doneah anything, your Excellencyahcy, it has beenah in the tearah of yourah opposition.' Nevertheless, the King, stammering, draped a *cie* over my head.

Freddy Ogilvie, new Director-General of the BBC, murmured: 'I have no option but to accept your resignation.' Perfectly correct: I had had the extraordinary idea that Nation-should-

speaking-peace-unto-Nation. At the Ministry of Food Lord Woolton growled: 'If you must persist in employing conscientious objectors...' At the Ministry of Aircraft Production Sir Archibald Rowlands was more candid: 'I don't know, Lionel, what you are belly-aching about: you have a good salary and not much to do.' But I had had enough of the factories of death and the lying eulogies of workers in them. Surprisingly, 'out of the blue, I became Editor-on-trial (a short trial) of the *Observer*. Waldorf Astor, ever kind and courteous, said over lunch at the Holborn Restaurant: 'You write very well, my dear Audax, even Bernard Shaw says so, but I do want you to outwrite Scrutator.' But I could not outwrite Scrutator: war strategy bored me stiff. My thoughts are turning to embusqués chickens in the country when a War Office letter flutters on to my table. Italy. The little King pacing up and down in Brindisi. 'At least I have saved the House of Savoy: but oh! my coins!' Mason MacFarlane grunts at me and I could get on with him if he were not surrounded by so many feckless advisers. Admiral Ellery Stone, U.S. Navy is quite another proposition. 'After this Matthews affair, I shall have to intervene personally with the President to get you replaced.' Okay by me: another fruitless war is over anyhow. Let America reign. Aeroplane from Rome to Cornwall, of all places. My father is dead: and after all I am not cut off with a shilling. A hundred and twenty thousand pounds. Quite something. I am fifty years old: what shall I do now? Not the vaguest idea. Death duties forty thousand, debts twenty-five thousand, legacies twenty thousand, lawyers two thousand – am I really signing all these colossal cheques? Not so much after all. Still, I have never had capital before. Should I go on working? Perhaps I must.

Lord Wright growls angrily: 'If you must resign in this tempestuous manner, you will kindly remember that you are not at liberty to divulge what you have learned in the Allied War Crimes Commission.' What I had learned, I said, was that victorious nations were vindictive. I added, just for fun, that I should publish every detail. 'If you do –' spluttered Lord Wright. But no, I had had enough of bureaucracy. I would go to Italy, home of the irresponsible and the warm-hearted. There, in a lovely house with a lovely garden and an extensive view, I would forget the world. Easier said than done. The world continued to annoy me. I grunted and muttered about it. I was getting old. 'Sour grapes!' said my friends.

Not quite what one had expected, certainly. I have gone wrong. I am out of step. Where did that start? Since my mother died, rather melodramatically, when I was nine months old, my only impressions of her are derived from old photographs, a few facts, and some hearsay. Evidently she was very handsome, according to hearsay she was wildly impulsive, and her musical compositions, some of which are still procurable, suggest a charming talent in the manner of Chaminade. She was certainly very popular. She had no money. To her greatest friend, later my godmother, she confided that she had married my father because he looked like Sir George Alexander: a rather slight foundation for a life partnership. My father may have looked like that: he was in fact more like Mr Jorrocks without the gaiety.

There they were, then, happily wed in the year 1895, and settled, as my father's mania for hunting dictated, in the depths of the country. And they were depths. The house was twenty miles from a railway station, gained only by trit-trot. One January evening, when snow was beginning to fall, my father, returning from hunting, slid from his horse at the drive gates. He was picked up unconscious and carried into the house. Specialists summoned (and they must have taken some time to arrive) declared that he had serious and incurable heart disease. He would never be able to walk upstairs, much less ride a horse, again. He was then about thirty years old. He proceeded to hunt every day until he died of cancer in his eightieth year. So much for specialists.

My mother, nursing devotedly (but I should guess scattily), had called in a sister-in-law to help her. One day she said: 'I have a frightful pain, and I think I am going to die.' She was right. Specialists summoned again made a hideously wrong diagnosis, operated there and then (under conditions which one flinches to think about), and killed her. My father, still half-conscious, was dragged to her bed to say goodbye. No one expected him to survive. My mother's brother, an unattractive gadfly who later became Mayor of Tunbridge Wells, had been sent for, and sat by her bedside recording her last words. I still have those strange yellowing pages. Perhaps death makes us all altruistic: perhaps my mother really was so. Most of her remarks are concerned with people in the village, to whom soup or bandages or medicines should continue to be sent: there is a passage, not ironic, 'thanking the doctors for all that they had done': there is a wish that I should be brought up by a specified

aunt: and a direction that her dowry of twenty-five thousand pounds should go to her brother, where indeed it went and disappeared. The concluding phrase, 'I am quite comfortable now', gives me an optimistic feeling about death.

As the upshot of all this, my father disappeared for seven years, and I was sent to live with my grandmother and three maiden aunts in an enormous house in Surrey.

I have a persistent belief that my grandmother was a remarkable woman. However, I am wary about this, as I know that grandmothers are apt to become legendary. Nevertheless, her pictures prove beyond doubt that she had unusual beauty and unusual serenity, qualities which she never lost even when, in her hundredth year, sitting upright in a chair and looking exquisite, she imperceptibly breathed her last. I knew her daily and hourly for the first seven years of my life, and for the ensuing twenty-five of hers saw her as often as I could. No other human being has ever made on me the same impression of unruffled dignity and complete unselfishness. I never saw her show a trace of anger or exasperation. Her favourite phrase was: 'It doesn't signify.' But she was not indifferent to people or things: far from it.

She was no intellectual, but attracted them as a flower bees. There was always a steady trickle of celebrities from the worlds of science, medicine, and literature. Manuscripts and missals were brought for her delight, and she was not above placing on them a large indiarubber facsimile of an ink-blot, and feigning a horrid alarm, vividly shared by the curator. She had a fertile imagination, and on one Christmas Eve, when many of the family children were gathered round the table, chafing to get at the presents, she caused the butler to present her with a huge scarlet envelope carrying a dangling seal. Opening it very slowly and peering at the contents, she announced with a little squeak of surprise: 'Gracious! Father Christmas has called, and tells me that you may open your presents tonight! Run, children, run, you may see the sledge and the reindeer!' We ran, and could almost swear that we saw it, or at least heard its bells, tinkling away down the drive.

'When I married your grandfather in 1847,' she told me, 'we went to Bath for the weekend before starting on the Grand Tour. It was what people did then. After supper, your grandfather took me to walk in the churchyard, and spoke of the life hereafter, and I thought it rather funny, but didn't like to say so.'

Grandfather was a handful, no doubt: he came of a line of Quakers but had made himself a Unitarian. His oleograph shows him handsome and bad-tempered. When, as a child, one of my aunts bit her small brother, he told her: 'True, if you do that again, I shall bite *you*!' She did it again and heard his heavy footstep approach. Slowly he raised her and bit her arm to the bone. He fussed about his health, and kept a large steam yacht, a thousand tonner, in which he sailed the Mediterranean every winter. He 'gave' my grandmother fourteen children, a chore which kept her busy from her seventeenth to her thirty-third year. They were raised by an army of nurses and tutors, presided over by Dorsay, the old nurse: an endearing product of Lancashire who stood no nonsense from anybody. The children in their holidays were sent overland to join the yacht in Lisbon or Barcelona or Venice or Athens. My grandmother detested the yacht, and got off it whenever possible. From Lisbon she would drive with postillions to Barcelona, and from Genoa to Venice, making water-colour sketches and writing a witty diary. Small wonder that in later years she seldom knew her children apart. 'Was that,' she would whisper to me, 'Beatrice? It was *Katie*? Of course: how stupid of me!'

Nutfield Priory, which my grandfather had built when he married, was (and is) a house of extreme hideosity. My reason tells me this, though my emotions do not. Mr Gibson, the architect, had to keep to grandfather's command that no wall should be less than three feet thick. Apart from that, he was allowed to spread himself in neo-Gothic abandon. There were two crenellated towers, a vaulted cloister, thirty bedrooms, a Great Hall with (needless to say) an organ and a minstrel's gallery, as well as a stained glass window as large as that of York Minster, in which, in fearful colours, the joys of the Lancashire cotton operatives at the passing of the Ten Hours Bill (which my greatgrandfather had pushed through the House) were appallingly celebrated. The fenestration was a riot of pierced stone: gargoyles sprouted everywhere. The clou of the house was, quite by chance I think, the grand staircase. This, seen through a high Gothic arch, flowed down to the Great Hall like a smooth river. It was an IQ test of the first order. The rule (obvious to those who lived in the house) was that you must come straight down the middle of it, head erect and back straight, never stumbling or wavering. Grandmamma, of course, got first prize: she floated down. Aunt Una, plump and practical, managed it with

dignity if not with grace, and kept a straight line. Aunt True, whose hair had gone white at twenty-five, and who was pretty and a bit daft, wavered about and glanced upwards and downwards, left and right. Aunt Sarah, to whose especial care I had been committed, was mannish in stiff collars and uncompromising shoes: she crushed the staircase but kept a steady line. The guests often provided a comic turn, tacking wildly between wall and bannister. Those stairs gave me a habit of watching people's movements and deducing – rightly or wrongly – their character therefrom. I would still make considerable bets about that deduction.

I was very fortunate – or my mother was very wise – in the matter of Aunt Sarah. She was a duck and a darling. She was the only woman I have ever known who had no trace of vanity. Although very handsome, she never looked into a mirror if she could help it: the absence of mirrors was a feature of all her dwellings. She parted her hair in the middle and drew it back into a tight bun. She never used cosmetics or powder. Her clothes were severe and she disdained hats whenever possible: at home, she would cram on an old cloth cap in inclement weather. She was a fearless horsewoman, an exceptionally good swimmer and diver, a gifted gardener, and a true Christian. And she was the soul of fun. Given me to play with for seven years, she was desolated when my father removed me, and fell into a nervous breakdown which lasted for two years. Then she took a house in Percy Street and devoted herself to rescuing prostitutes. It was not a great success, and she married an attractive clergyman, and at forty-two produced a son. From then on her life ran smoothly, with an increasing and charming family. My life took me further and further away from her, but, when she died at the age of ninety-four, I still loved her more than I have ever loved any human being. Once she left me in a toyshop, saying, 'You can pick what you like: I will be back in an hour.' She came back to find me red and flustered, saying 'Difficult, difficult, difficult!' So she took me away, saying: 'Now you get nothing, as the result of feebleness.' That summed me up.

If Nutfield is ugly, its setting is superb. Situated on the spur of a hill seventeen miles south of London, it is (or was) as lonely as Devon or Wales. Behind the house, thick woods of beech and rhododendron rise steeply: from the terrace on the south, the ground drops away in a smooth green robe to the lake below, and rises again to other woods. Beyond them stretches an immense

view: on clear days the sea sparkles on the horizon. The gardens wander for a mile along abrupt slopes, and here my grandfather planted every rare tree that he could find. Even if today it is the Headquarters of NAAFI, dotted with hideous huts, it was once a Paradise, and a private one. I am all for Paradise being private.

Life at Nutfield was held firmly in a framework of habit and ceremony. As the hands of the grandfather clock which stood beside the organ moved towards eight in the morning, doors would softly open upstairs, the sound, followed by that of rustling skirts, pereolating through the gallery to the Great Hall. The descent of the staircase would be made by the family and guests. Arrived in the Hall, they stood: no one said good morning, no one spoke. As the clock struck eight, my grandmother's door, in the centre of the gallery, opened: and presently she floated down to us. She smiled but did not speak, continuing past us through the Gothic arch beyond the organ, and entering the morning-room. We followed, and arranged ourselves on small gilt chairs round the walls. Then the servants, who had been waiting at the green baize door in strict order of precedence, headed by the cook and butler, filed in. I suppose there were about twenty of them. Grandmamma read prayers – brief – from a book which she had printed for these occasions. Then she rose, and wished the servants good morning: they filed out. She would then make some optimistic remark about the weather, and we went into the dining-room, where breakfast was set at a huge circular table in the window-embrasure, overlooking the immense view.

And what a breakfast it was! A feast far different from the mingy hurried breakfasts of today. There were always six or seven silver dishes sizzling above spirit lamps: kidneys, sausages, eggs in various form, kippers, haddock, devilled chicken, kedgerree, and of course porridge and cream and brown sugar. On the opposite sideboard were the cold dishes: peach-fed York ham, glistening tongue, cold turkey, grouse, partridge, pheasant, guinea-fowl, and home-made brawn. And, naturally, fresh warm home-made cottage loaves and scones, and butter from the dairy, salted and yellow as a buttercup. A delicious profusion. No doubt people were starving all over the world, as they are today. That melancholy fact no more affected the splendour of those breakfasts than a million bad painters affect the beauty of a Rembrandt. Life is unfair, and will be.

After breakfast I read *The Times* to Grandmamma, and she

talked to me about the estate and the people on it, the political scene, and the latest literary developments. She treated me always as an adult. She then attended to her correspondence, which was voluminous. Apart from anything else fourteen children and their descendants, however vague she was about them, made considerable claims. I, meanwhile, stretched myself on the carpet underneath the ebony and ivory desk which was so like her, and gave myself up to the fairy tales with which she provided me lushly. The brothers Grimm, Hans Andersen, Andrew Lang, *The Phantastes* of George MacDonald, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Prince Perry-pets*, and so many more: I was soon lost in a world of dreams. Towards eleven o'clock, Grandmamma took her pony and trap and did a round of the estate. This was a business which she took very seriously: she was aware not only of the health or illness, but also of the character and temperament, of every man, woman, and child on it. She was immensely popular, and indeed respected for many miles around: had she stood for Parliament she would have had a thumping majority. She was not, of course, alone in that: plenty of landlords felt their responsibilities keenly. It was only after 1918 that the absentee landlord came to dwell in London and rejoice in Tatler photographs.

Meanwhile I was free to wander, and wander I did. Filled with ideas of gnomes and elves and fairies, I saw them all. I spoke, confidentially to the great redwoods, snuffling against their soft bark: and they answered me. I sat under the weeping acacia, knowing that she was dangerous and might at any moment enfold me. I was well aware that the oak and the beech could be trusted, but that the ash and the birch were false and could catch me in their long fingers. I had my special garden, up the hill through a tangle of rhododendrons, where a tame toad came to my whistle. It was understood that nobody else came, except at my invitation. There stood the great tree known for miles around as the High Beech, of colossal mossy girth and sprawling roots: to her I confided my innermost secrets. Forty years later I made my way through an increased tangle to sit again beneath that smooth trunk: and I kissed it, and knew the strange joy of animism.

Children, except on festive occasions, seldom came to the house; the exception was my cousin Noel Stone, for whom I cherished a hero-worship which was amply justified. He was charming, gentle, wise: he was the nearest thing I had to an elder

brother: to my everlasting loss, he was killed in France in 1918. I never went to parties. There I was, a precocious, elderly little boy: a prig: and very vulnerable. I had had a magic childhood, which suited me to perfection. It was not a preparation for the turbulence to come. I did not learn to be a good mixer, I did not learn ambition, but I did learn to be on excellent terms with solitude. And since, whatever we may say, we are all solitary throughout life, I am humbly grateful for those seven gentle years.

Presently there appeared at Nutfield a dazzling being whom I knew as Dodo. Dodo was something quite new. I did not find her beautiful, possibly because she conformed to Edwardian standards with which I was unfamiliar: thin lips, dogged chin, a statuesque lack of warmth (Queen Alexandra, I suppose, was the model). But she exuded an atmosphere of wealth and luxury. My grandmother and aunts, though dressed by Mr Worth, were, if not exactly dowdy, very sober in dress. But Dodo was superbly elegant. Her constantly changed gowns and furs and rings glittered and glowed. She condescended to play with me, and although in some recess of my mind I knew that she was illiterate about fairies and trees, I was flattered by the chinchilla and Parma violets. I knew obscurely that there was a great gap between her and my grandmother and my aunts: they were extremely courteous, but conversation did not flow.

I did not of course know that she was engaged to my father: and had I known it would have meant nothing. She was the daughter of Thomas Ismay, who had founded the White Star Line and was wealthy far beyond the Fieldens. Neither family could claim aristocracy, but the Fieldens had a three-generation start on the road to gentility. Dodo, already an Edwardian, was a trifle vulgar by Victorian standards. She had been brought up to social climbing by way of titled guests, bridge, racing, cosmetics, scent, and other social quirks which Nutfield deplored. On her side she deplored intellectuals, art, and dowdiness. The chasm which opened between her and Nutfield was wider and deeper than any that existed between, say, my grandmother and her servants and tenants.

I was taken to London, and at St George's, Hanover Square, dressed in a white sailor suit, I distributed 'favours', walking up and down the aisle and handing lilies of the valley, wrapped in silver paper, to ladies in feathered hats whose frothing skirts

filled the pews. 'Isn't he sweet? The stepson, you know,' they whispered. It was all a mystery to me. There was a reception, with a red carpet and an awning, in Cadogan Square. I was led down, and my head poked into the waiting brougham, where my father and Dodo strangely sat. I knew that they were going 'abroad', which seemed exciting. But my father, whom I scarcely knew, frightened me with his long face.

I said: 'Good-bye, Dodo!' My father said: 'In future you will call her Mother.' Black rage filled me: I saw the now empty tiara in Heaven. I screamed: '*Never! Never! Never!*' had was removed, a hideous blot on the festivities.

So, a new life began.

My father, it seems to me, was an unusual man. But I may be wrong about that. Perhaps men with limited minds are far more usual than we care to allow. Certainly my father went through life in blinkers of his own making. What he did not like he did not choose to see. What he liked were horses, hounds, and foxes: and very little else. Connected with those came the inevitable accoutrements: saddles, bridles, scarlet coats, white breeches, top boots, velvet caps, and stables of staggering expense. He kept fifty horses, and half as many grooms to look after them. He hunted on five days every week, on the sixth he did his accounts and attended to any business which a mastership of foxhounds involved, on the seventh he went to church (not attending to it, but for example), and afterwards conducted guests round the stables and kennels. That was his life. His philosophy was based on it. Until his death in 1944, he would stoutly maintain that no war could be won without cavalry. He saw the world like that, and nothing would change him. He was a perfectly sincere man. He never, as far as I can make out, had the smallest doubt about his aims in life. Furiously opposed by his father, he refused to go to any University, and went to a veterinary college instead. Fortunately for him, his father died when he was twenty and left him a couple of hundred thousand pounds. From then on, he could please himself.

No one can plumb the depths of the human heart, but I think that my father was largely indifferent to houses, family, food, heat and comfort. He had a cold bath every morning, breaking the ice in winter, until the end of his life: a hot bath, he once told me, made him feel ill. He detested all 'made-up' dishes, and frequently sent them away, demanding cold beef, which I think

he would have preferred for every meal. He had no interest in clothes except as a convention: he wore stiff choker collars in summer and winter, and ordered the same dark suits every year. He recognized the need of a wife, but his ideas were oriental on that subject: the female must be there, she must run the house and bear children, and she had no right to absent herself. (My stepmother took this well, and rather liked it.) He never went out to a meal, never stayed away in a strange house, and never (it is hardly necessary to add) went willingly to that fearful 'abroad'. (My stepmother once took him to Oberammgau: two cars were necessary, one to take them and one to follow with stores of bacon, marmalade and cold beef: it was a frightful failure.) All in all, I don't think that my father would have cared one jot if he had had to live in a wigwam in direst poverty, provided that he could hunt the fox.

My father's views on Art will now, I trust, be fairly obvious. His reading was confined to Surtees and Whyte-Melville, on the rare occasions when he was ill. He never visited a picture gallery, never went to a concert (any such idea would have been daft), had no interest in architecture or sculpture. He must have had some vague ideas about great painters, but I think he pushed them out of his mind. (The only comment I ever heard him make about the lovely Canalettos in his dining-room was 'Well, so that old tower's fallen down at last'.) He thought in all sincerity that painting and music were occupations for ladies. That a man should paint or play the piano was, to him, a decadent horror. He refused, naturally, to allow me to have drawing lessons, and kept the piano locked against me. He wanted me - and quite rightly, from his point of view - to be a Master of Foxhounds. I was a terrible, a shattering, disappointment. Under his frightful tuition I learned - partly thanks to my long legs - to have a good seat on a horse, and to control it: I also learned to hate horses. I also learned to hate him. It was an unreasonable hatred, because my father was a just and not unkindly man: but no hatred is more stubborn than the hatred of those who confer obligations which we cannot fulfil.

It did not, obviously, occur to my father, after his marriage to Dodo, that my removal from Nutfield would produce a confusion of thought - now called schizophrenia - from which I should never recover. For seven years he had allowed me to be submitted to one code of behaviour: now for another ten he gave me another, diametrically opposed. My grandmother had taught

me that gentleness, repose, tolerance, self-effacement and solitude were life's best prizes: my stepmother insisted that ambition, ruthlessness, gregariousness and success were the essentials: my father did not worry himself about ethics or behaviour, so long as I 'went well to hounds'. Thus I became and have remained tolerant and intolerant, gentle and ruthless, ambitious and timid, worldly and yet solitary: a walking contradiction in terms, to be summed up by various people, according to their tastes, as unreliable or unpredictable, unstable, disloyal, or plain eccentric. In these days, when so many complaints are heard about young delinquents, and education – or psychiatric brain-washing – is skied up as a cure-all, I sometimes wonder whether parents, rather than their children, are in need of reform. It seems curious, to say the least, that degrees and examinations are required for teachers, but no sort of test is demanded for prospective parents, who are responsible beyond all others for the behaviour of each younger generation.

Returning from their honeymoon in Germany, my father and Dodo took themselves, and me, to Foston Hall near Derby. Nutfield was certainly no gem of architecture, but it was at least built of grey stone and set in a superb situation. Foston was mauve Victorian brick and slate in a dull landscape. Here began the squares of cabbage, the tutors, the cold baths, and the horses (or, rather, the ponies). I was utterly lost in a strange land. My father and Dodo were remote and frightening people. My grandmother and aunts had treated me as a loved equal: at Foston I was an unwanted child. Nature, which had seemed so great a friend at Nutfield, retreated at Foston: the Derbyshire trees had nothing to say to me, nor I to them. Foston was then a very isolated place: an hour and a half in the brougham to Derby, and nothing nearer than that. I do not remember that any children ever came to that house. Visitors were grown-ups of the hunting and racing clans. I was unhappy with the deathly hopeless unhappiness of unloved childhood. I was so unhappy that I became ill. I don't know what ailed me, but I remember being wheeled around the garden on a kind of bier, upon which I had to lie flat. I wanted nothing but to run back to Nutfield. My stepmother's natural exasperation with me must have begun at about this time.

In spite of all that, I wrote a novel. I suppose it was prompted partly by loneliness and partly by the Nutfield addiction to literature and its lack at Foston. It started, God knows why,

with the 'rescue' of a 'forlorn maiden' on a 'deserted beach', and went on to improbable Hans Andersen adventures in improbable parts of the world. I wrote it all out carefully in copperplate, and illustrated it with full-page pen-and-ink drawings: it was also bound in green ribbon. Proudly one evening I handed it to Dodo, who was writing letters at her desk. She riffled through the pages, said, 'What a funny child you are,' and handed it back to me. I never tried that again, and it was not until fifteen years later that I began, owing to the kindness and encouragement of Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, to write for publication. Not that that calls for any self-pity: had I been a born writer, my stepmother's indifference would not have discouraged me. I was not a born writer, or at least had not the necessary perseverance, and so I was deflected. Probably the world was spared a lot of rubbish.

The mauve episode of Foston was fortunately brief, and ended when my father and Dodo moved to London to await the arrival of my half-sister. I was despatched to Nutfield, where I recovered instantly. But, as soon as my sister was safely born, I was sent to the house leased for the occasion, 20 Hertford Street, Park Lane. That then luxurious mansion (I believe it is now a block of flats) had an automatic lift, a marvel in 1903. I took myself up and down in it continually, until Nannie recounted a grisly tale of two charwomen in an adjacent house, who had got stuck between floors while the owners were abroad, and were discovered, grinning skeletons (that was how she told it), six weeks later. After that I gave the lift a miss, and have never since been quite at ease in automatic lifts.

Life in London was planned for me to the last detail and minute. I had a governess, an incoming teacher of French, another of mathematics, another of Latin. I attended a gymnasium called MacPherson's, a dancing school, a fencing master, a riding school (of course), and a swimming bath. The fencing was splendid fun: I found myself quite good: but that was my only experience of it. The dancing school was repulsive. I was quite ready to dance, but my ear was offended by the banged piano, and my nose by the sweaty little girls I had to partner. Riding in the Row was easy after the country, though fraught with some terrors: what would happen if the pony bolted into Knightsbridge? But the swimming bath was nightmare: here I encountered for the first time my step-cousin Charles, of the Ismay clan, destined to be a thorn in my side, and held up as an example, for



the next ten years. He was everything that I was not: beefy, tough, active, talkative, extrovert. My father and step-uncle attended the swimming bath and said: 'Jump in!' Charles jumped: I didn't. Pushed, I sank to the bottom and remained there until rescued. It was idiotic: I learned later that I was by nature a much better swimmer than Charles and liked water far more: but my father paralysed me. The gymnasium was worst of all: some forty children attended, and all herds arouse my obstinacy. I did not in the least desire to vault and climb and box and wrestle and pant over press-ups. For some strange reason I was placed in the front row when we gave a demonstration before assembled parents. Instantly I peed in my trousers, and was led away from the shaming pool.

On Sunday afternoons, as a duty (I did not see him otherwise, except at the swimming-pool), my father 'took me out'. A hansom was called at two thirty, and when we were seated in it my father would say, 'Which is it to be? The Houses of Parliament, the Zoo, or Earl's Court?' I knew that the proper answer was not the last: but the water-chute, the side-shows, the coloured fountains, the switchback and the flip-flap were of infinitely greater attraction than Regent's Park or Westminster. Sometimes I dared it but soon discovered that, alone with my solemn father (in top hat, of course), it was not much fun. Once our horse fell down in Hay Hill, and that was the best outing of all. Hansoms were exciting, and I wonder if any more engaging vehicle has ever been invented: one had a splendid view, with the apron doors cosily over one's knees: the cabby's bent head was mysteriously outlined against the sky when one spoke to him through the overhead hatch, pushed open with an umbrella: when it rained, down came the fascinating folding wire 'ow.

Presently my parents moved to Farnborough Hall near Banbury. On the first evening my stepmother had a fit of hysterics in the hall, and vowed she couldn't live there. I watched, entranced but unmoved. It was not very surprising. The house was arctic and uncomfortable: I suppose my father had taken it with nothing but hunting in mind. It had twenty bedrooms and one prehistoric bath. But architecturally it was of great beauty. It possessed a superb carved staircase and a unique diningroom, in which half-a-dozen exquisite Canalettos had been let in to the walls, and a charming frieze of plaster-work arranged round them. It also had three large natural lakes, and a strange garden feature called The Terrace, which flowed for a mile in a thirty-

yard-wide carpet of mown grass along the hill, and ended in an obelisk which commemorated something or somebody. It was and is a beautiful place. It is now in the hands of the National Trust.

Here I happened on my first experience of sex, though I should not, of course, have recognized it as such. My cousin Evelyn, aged six to my eight, arrived for a visit. She was a charming little person and we got on very well. It was the first time that I had been friendly with a small girl. One day, playing in the shrubbery, I was seized with a desire to know why she was in some strange way different from me. I asked her to take off her clothes, which she did at once, and I did the same. Greatly puzzled, we examined our different bodies. We could make little of it. We came to the conclusion that one of us – but which? – must be deformed. The shrubbery was overlooked by the stables, and a groom carried the news to my father. There followed an almighty row. We were both beaten into bruises and tears. We had not the faintest clue as to what we had done that was wrong. We were only called ‘disgusting’. I never dared to speak of it to Evelyn again. I imagine that we both continued to think that one of us – but which? – had a deformity which must be concealed at all costs. I don’t know what this did to our sex lives: perhaps quite a lot. But perhaps nothing. I don’t know how parents should deal with such a situation. The only deduction I can draw is that the so-called ‘facts of life’ should somehow be made familiar and ordinary at a very early age.

Soon after this I was packed off to a preparatory school at Broadstairs. This was a new blow, a veritable nadir. Stone House was, no doubt, good as preparatory schools went: from the moment when the four-wheeler containing myself and my silent father turned the corner under the dripping wall, I knew that I was going to prison. Most small boys of eight are probably not happy about going to school for the first time, but I was and am more allergic than most to human nature in the herd. My dislike of all places – schools, cinemas, theatres, football matches, railway trains, aeroplanes, restaurants, public meetings, crowds, and cocktail parties – where human beings are massed, amounts to agoraphobia and claustrophobia combined. Even in cities I am ill at ease. Human beings packed together are turned, as by Circe, into swine. That is why I would rather die than submit to communism or socialism or any other ism which seeks, in a dotty dream of non-existent equality, to have a merry ghastly get-

together of all. Human beings are only tolerable as individuals.

The presiding deity of Stone House was the Reverend W.H. Churchill. He had a drooping grey mustache, a large red nose, and an immense sapphire ring. He wore rubber shoes, and prowled around silently carrying a fives bat, with which he clearly derived much satisfaction in beating tender young bottoms. He had a ham sense of theatre, and the chapel – rather a pretty one – was hung with embroidered silk flags of various colours on silver standards. What they represented I cannot imagine. When he preached on Sunday evenings, the lights were lowered, leaving only two altar candles to halo his face. On one occasion he went so far as to tell us: ‘Ah! my friends! When sin becomes a bore, there is the real tragedy.’ We drew some nasty conclusions about that.

The chapel was, however, for me about the most exciting thing at Stone House. True, it was a herd, but a controlled and quiet herd. I had by chance an unusually true and strong treble voice, and I was therefore picked to sing solos in anthems. This was fun and, in spite of my father, gave me the beginnings of a knowledge of music. Again, it was exciting when relatives came, and were seen for the first time in the visitors enclosure at the back of the chapel: and one knew (while singing *The Wings of a Dove*) that one was going out to a delicious lunch at the Granville Hotel at Ramsgate. Then came the tragic (but rather succulent) moment when, at the evening service, one saw the relatives for the last time, and sang (with fought-back tears) *The Day Thou gavest Lord is Ended*. I need not say that my father and stepmother were not among the relatives: they did not approve of such visits.

I can't leave the chapel without one other memory, which remains astonishingly vivid. The father of one boy, Dames-Longworth, died suddenly: he was found dead in a wood. The mother was a well-known Irish beauty. She came down to the school shortly afterwards, and by special concession was escorted to a front pew usually reserved for Mrs Churchill. She was dressed with stunning elegance and, as was the fashion in those days, swathed in long black veils which swirled from her black ostrich feather hat. It was an occasion, and the eyes of the school were upon her. Slowly she drew off her long black gloves, and, raising white hands covered with diamond rings, put back her veils. The sun glittered on the diamonds, and on the beautiful pale face. We were enraptured: she was a goddess.

Mr Churchill was a mean man: the food was nearly uneatable, and although we did not quite freeze I remember few occasions so continuously cold as those Thanet winters, with the fog-horns blaring out at sea. The masters, probably underpaid, were an uninspiring lot. That did not matter: we were only required to achieve a pass into a public school. I suppose we gathered a smattering of English, mathematics, and Latin. Games were held to be much more important than work, and in these, I need hardly say, I lamentably failed to distinguish myself.

Thus five years passed away. There was not a great deal to choose between holidays and school. Farnborough had 'its advantages: it was more comfortable, the food was much better, there was some privacy: but there were also the tutors, the cold baths, the riding school, and, worst of all, the parties. To these last my stepmother (and quite rightly, poor dear, according to her views) insisted that I must go. Cricket matches, pony shows, dances – they were all undiluted hell to me. I set up a hideous and irrational fuss about them. I was pushed into the brougham (two hours each way) and, once arrived, stood in a corner with tears pouring down my cheeks, or in some such way disgraced myself, until removed. I screamed at the idea of going to stay in strange houses: forcibly taken, I not only wetted my bed but also soiled it: I would not visit strange lavatories. Small wonder that my stepmother was infuriated and ashamed: in her place I would have strangled me: I was a torture to myself and everyone else.

Memory paints these years dead black: but of course nothing is ever quite that. I had a stately home, a good school, wealthy parents, a privileged position. I was, best of all gifts, young. I adored my small half-sister. Occasionally I escaped to Nutfield. Even at Farnborough, there was a boat on the lake, collections of bird's eggs and butterflies and stamps, outings now and then, and the fearful excitement of a mammoth Daimler car in that carless age. I must have enjoyed quite a lot of it. Yet I remember that I regarded tramps and crossing-sweepers with envy, and wished that I could change places with them. Whatever my privileges, my sort of freedom, the freedom to be private and to *do nothing*, a freedom to which I still cling in spite of all the slogans and interferences, was not among them.

Now came Eton. I was by this time inured, at least on the surface, to going to school. Before I left for my first term at Eton, my father called me into his study. 'Sit down, please,' he said.

I felt that something dreadful was coming. 'I suppose,' he said sternly, 'you have heard of sodomy?' I gasped, 'Yes, father.' I had not the faintest idea what he was talking about. 'You can,' said my father, 'get nine years penal servitude for it.' I said, 'Yes, father.' I sat in the Daimler and wondered. I asked Irwin, the chauffeur, if he could please drive me at sixty miles an hour. He was a nice man, and did so: it was thrilling, I could brag about it. *What* had my father said? Follow me? Roddery? God-damy? Something to do with religion? Nine years penal servitude? All very puzzling.

After Stone House, Eton offered expanding horizons. It is not a bad prison, as prisons go. It had, for me, three great advantages: a room of one's own, leisure to read, and the possibility, on half-holidays, of slouching idly around the streets of Windsor or the countryside. There were of course other prizes: election to 'Pop', Captain of the Boats, and so on. I did not aspire to such. I should have been uncomfortable in a fancy waistcoat and a buttonhole, and sport was, as it is, a closed book to me. I marvel at the pursuit of balls by adults. I suppose that, if there had been a rush to elect me to Pop, or to make me Captain of the Cricket Eleven, I should have swelled with pride: I don't know: I cannot remember ever lusting after such things. When my father died I found in his safe some old Eton reports on me: one of them, by Headlam, my classical tutor, read: 'This boy has a strange and puzzling character: he could be brilliant but he does not wish to excel. Nor does he wish to fail. As far as I understand him, he wishes to avoid any limelight.'

Education is an elusive and debatable affair. The human race certainly has made a muddle of it, so far. Perhaps it can be divided under four heads – character, erudition, arts, and technology. I don't think anything falls outside these four. They are all quite different, and all to some extent necessary. If they could be combined exactly to fit the limitations of personality and ability, a perfect education might result. They never are and never can be, because inspired teachers are as rare as dodos, and human scholars learn at different paces and with different tastes. No legislation can ever solve that problem. History shows clearly that education, by itself, never produced outstanding men. Heredity, environment, circumstance, natural talent, may do that: not education. Nor do we really believe that it can do so: children are sent to school not to be educated but to get them out of the way at an awkward age.

The value of Eton (at least in my day) was perhaps precisely the dismissal, by long tradition, of education *per se*. Scholarship was regarded as eccentric, the arts were non-existent, technology was a matter for 'saps', and even athletics, though prized, were not insisted on. You were, so to speak, left to fight it out for yourself. The *beau idéal*, almost the idol, was the member of Pop, who was – in so far as he could be defined at all – a mixture of glamour, good manners, and self-confidence. It was not a bad star to follow. Tradition was ferocious: it stretched from definable things, such as leaving the bottom button of one's waistcoat undone, having the trousers turned up, and the top hat not too shiny and yet not too disgustingly buffed, to matters undefinable such as a stop on all reference to wealth or family, an avoidance of both scruffiness and smartness, and a refusal to sneak or whimper when – a usual and terrifying occurrence – one was shut up for an hour inside an 'ottoman', with a lot of boys sitting on top. Eton could not make silk purses out of sow's ears, but it could veneer them to look very much like silk for some considerable time.

Since grandmamma, or my natural bent, had taught me to read, I read voraciously during my five years at Eton, and undoubtedly I found my happiest hours with a book on my window-sill, or beside the fire, or discovering new treasures in the Windsor bookshops. Nobody guided me, and my reading was scatty. I plunged through Dickens, Thackeray, Reade, Austen, Trollope, the Brontës: I also wallowed in Rider Haggard, and the delicious forbidden fruits of Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, Elinor Glyn, and Mrs Henry Wood. Half-way through the five years, I discovered poetry by chance.

Whatever it may be now, the teaching at Eton then was of a very low standard. Few 'beaks' had any gift of inspiration. Or possibly we did not look for it. Among the classicists was Booker, who taught Greek. When we were unable to remember a word like, say, ΚΕΚΑΥΚΑ, he would bark at us: 'What are you? What are you? Tell me what you are!' And we knew the answer. 'A corker, Sir!' 'Yes, a corker, an ignorant corker, you great big floundering jackass!' He had a gold repeater watch, and would draw it out and make it strike while we were writing an essay. If we looked up, he would make a ferocious face and demand: 'What are you gaping at, you great booby?' It was a bit music-hall, but he was popular and made some Greek stick. Later he had a murder in his house, which much increased his glamour.

There was Ramsay, who taught Latin, and made it obligatory to speak nothing else in school. For those who suddenly wanted to pee or vomit, as boys not infrequently do, this was difficult: to explain why one had whispered to one's neighbour, and what, was sheer stalemate. It was a good idea, but it needed a greater sense of humour than Ramsay's to make it work. French classes were a riot of insubordination, and nobody learnt anything (why learn frogs lingo anyway?). Mathematics were a long yawn. The final absurdity was reached with Broadbent in the Upper Fifth. He was a half-paralysed man in his eighties and his sight and hearing were seriously affected. He never entered school without water or cabbages or confetti falling on his bald pate: mice, snakes, and frogs were let out and chased: all translations were read directly from a crib, so that we must all have had full marks every time. I suppose the poor old man gave us excellent reports. Education!

Of Eton three things stand out in memory, and a fourth merits a digression. First of the three was a classical 'beak', Bevan, who one day departed from tradition by saying: 'Before we begin, I think I must read you a poem from *The Spectator*.' (I think it was *The Spectator*: I know it was not a good poem.) He read it, and I was spellbound. Not only did I learn it and still remember it: it opened the gates of poetry to me. It was an example of the spark which a teacher can sometimes convey, perhaps altering a whole life. Maybe I should have discovered poetry in any case: I am not sure about that, and I salute Bevan. Second was the fainting of a boy next to me in chapel. He was carried out and I thought him dead. I was instantly convinced that the same fate lay in store for me. The chapel swam before my eyes, sweat beaded my forehead, I gripped the pew with wet hands. Soon I could think of nothing else. By day and by night I trembled at the thought of chapel. I lost weight: I could not eat. My house tutor, a kindly man, wrote to my father saying that I had a bad nerve-storm, and recommending a term's vacation. My father replied that he did not believe in nerves. I became allergic to churches.

The third matter was more serious. The Officers Training Corps at Eton was, like all military or semi-military bodies before 1914, a strictly 'voluntary' affair. The idea of any forced militarism was highly unpopular. Doubtless the sons of soldiers and sailors were subjected to a steady, if half-unconscious, pressure, to follow in their father's footsteps. In much the same way,

although every regulation clearly stated that a boy could choose to join or not to join, to leave or not to leave the OTC, Eton tradition decreed that everyone must join and stay. Like others, I joined. I did not like the weekly parades and drill, but they were brief and could be suffered. I disliked more violently the field days, when we were required to throw ourselves down in mud, stagger across wet ploughed fields and throw ourselves in mud again, for no purpose that I could discover: and then to sit, huddled like sardines, on long train journeys filled with bawdy songs and bullying. But these were trifles compared with Camp. Camp was ten days at Tidworth in pouring rain: ten to a tent, vicious homosexuality, greasy food cooked in dirty dixies, latrines made of a pole over a ditch, and all foulest instincts encouraged. Jolly good for the chaps, no doubt.

I made up my mind that I would never go to camp again. On my return to Eton in the autumn of 1913, I explained this to my tutor, M.D. Hill. He pooh-poohed it. He said, not without reason, that ten days of discomfort was of small importance: he added, less reasonably, that if I 'shirked' camp I should be excluded from all respectable careers – the Army, the Navy, Diplomacy, the Civil Service, and so on. In vain I protested that I wanted none of them. He would not help me: I had to help myself.

I therefore read the Training Manual with care, and found that, if a member of the OTC missed three parades in succession, he was sacked. I missed two, and then, as I had anticipated, was sent for by the Headmaster. I had prepared a careful brief for this eventuality, pointing out that I had the right to resign. Edward Lyttleton cut me short. 'I don't want,' he said, 'to hear anything about your strange attitude. If you do not go on parade on Monday, I shall expel you.' I retired: no boy of seventeen could call such a bluff. But bluff it was. In the then climate of opinion, an expulsion for failing to stay with the OTC would have brought down the Headmaster, not me. He knew it. But he counted, like Hitler, on fear, and he counted right. It made no difference, except to my rage against Lyttleton and against all things military. When camp came round again, I did not go. How happy should I have been if that had banned me from the Army! Not at all: Kitchener pointed his accusing finger at me, and I was cannon-fodder.

Last comes a small, but I think necessary, digression. When I was at Eton, homosexuality was not only common, it was a

general rule. I am tickled by the protestations of elderly gentlemen in the House of Lords or on the Bench, that they never knew or heard of anything of the kind. I almost think that they believe it themselves. It is the sheerest hypocrisy to imagine that, if you shut boys up with one another between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, when sex begins to stir, and deny them access to the opposite sex, they will refrain, like saints, from experimenting with each other's bodies. For some obscure reason – perhaps it was my mother's tiara – I was terrified of sex. I repulsed advances but regretted it. I emerged from Eton virginal, but cursed my virginity. The point I wish to make here – and I think it is a very valid point – is that, although I was and am by nature homosexual, Eton never corrupted me. I resent the silly old men who prate about the 'corruption' of youth. Sexual corruption is only possible among those who wish to be corrupted. The strange belief (if we are to believe Mr Butler in the House of Commons) that circumstances can change a heterosexual into a homosexual, or vice versa, is one of the silliest fantasies of our times.

Let me pause here. I have cantered over what may be a monotonous tract of country, noting points which have stuck in memory: a dark forest, a sunlit glade, a tangle of briars, an unexpected ditch. There remains the climate: the climate of opinion. Climates of opinion are not 'facts', and in this century we love 'facts'. Yet all history is meaningless without its climates of opinion. We cannot begin to understand historical events (as Gibbon so clearly saw) without placing ourselves under the influence of the opinions then current. Our own opinions will not do. We may think today that there should be equal opportunity for all, that medicine should be free, that imperialism is a bad thing, that wars should stop, that we should travel to the moon: these are today's ideas, which were not those of yesterday and may not be those of tomorrow: they are not eternal truths, though each generation may think its own truth eternal.

I speak here only of the climate of opinion in a relatively wealthy, rural community such as Nutfield at the turn of the century: I do not refer to climates of opinion in, say, factories or large cities or gatherings of politicians or revolutionaries. Those climates were different. But, at the turn of the century, 'Nutfields' were common in England: isolated islands of respectable feudalism, they preserved a climate which deeply affected those who dwelt in them. That climate now seems so remote, so

unreal, so almost unbelievable, that it is hard to recapture even by those who knew it, and nearly unimaginable by those who did not.

First, there was security. Nobody since 1918 has known that kind of security. And let me assure my socialist friends that it was a security which applied not only to the wealthy, but also to their dependants. People as old as my grandmother had known from afar the Crimean, Franco-Prussian, and Boer wars: the last had been somewhat shocking, but had ended as it should. Wars were the business of the Army and the Army alone, just as order was the business of the police. Wars were won as a matter of course, and they were localised and distant. Civilian families were not affected, except by the rather rare, but glorious fall of a member on the field of battle. England had been divinely appointed to keep order in the world, and keep it she would. It was not only a conviction, it was an absolute and unquestioned certainty, that Britannia would rule the seas for ever and ever, that the pound sterling would always buy two hundred loaves of bread, home-brewed beer be a penny a pint, and that the person of an Englishman could not be touched, except at extreme peril, in any part of the globe. It followed (in the then climate of opinion) that life as lived in England was the best kind of life that could be imagined. It was not thought that poor and uneducated people needed more than a bare living standard for happiness, and in any case it was not supposed that natural laws would permit anything else. *Hubris*, it may be said. *Hubris* no doubt. But you cannot, simply because you live in the context of today, regard it as unjust or unfeeling: that particular form of sentimentality did not exist. God was seated somewhere just above London: He liked it there, and He had ordained the English hierarchy.

This sense of security, of Time stopped, as it were, by the Pax Britannica, of living in the best country in the world, produced a feeling of placidity. Wealth was not coveted and hated as it is now, if only because there was not nearly so much to buy. My grandmother, though wealthy, was not rich as riches went then: she had a life interest of £6,000 per annum: her sons had each inherited about £200,000 and her daughters £30,000. Thus the wolf was a good long way from the door, and since income tax was a shilling in the pound, and servants could be had for ten shillings a week, there was not a great deal to spend money on. Ostentation was frowned upon: parties were rare: alcohol (except

for port, which was cheap) seldom appeared. In the homes of Mitchell the head gardener, Burgess the coachman, Terris the bailiff, Pound the butler, Hawkins the lodge-keeper, Dorsey the old nurse – to one or other of whom Grandmamma sent me on most days for tea – the standard of food, comfort and cleanliness seemed no different from that of the Priory. Central heating did not exist, and Victorian furniture was mostly hard. My host did not scruple to bat me over the head if I fidgeted or misbehaved. I was the son of the big house, so to speak, and there was, I suppose, a class distinction: but I was certainly unaware of it, and it carried no trace of servility or envy. My grandmother felt it her duty to look after the health, education, and well-being of her dependants and their children: it was understood that sons, if they wished, would succeed their fathers. The tight little community was geared to human life eternal.

Then, there was the absence of noise and gadgets. No motor cars, no motor buses, no aeroplanes, no pneumatic drills, no lorries: and no radios, no gramophones, no television sets, no cinemas, no dance-halls. Amenities (if they are) such as these were not missed, because they were not known. Advertisement had not got into its giant stride: apart from patent medicines, people were not urged to buy what they did not require. The wealthy could buy more and better clothes and furniture, collect pictures or china or silver, drive out in spanking carriages, eat rare food, and live a leisured life. But I doubt if these material advantages – except perhaps the last one – contributed greatly to happiness. Since food was cheap, and distractions few, life in a community such as Nutfield, though dull by modern standards, was neither uncomfortable nor insecure.

There was, of course, London. My grandmother went there – to Browns Hotel – twice a year: once to buy Christmas presents, once to buy clothes. My aunts went a little more often. Clippety-clop for three quarters of an hour to the station: chug-chug in the train (reserved compartment) for an hour over seventeen miles. Exhausting! And then London! Such clatter of hooves and hard wheels over the cobbles – did not anyone of consequence have straw laid down in the road in case of illness? The noise would have been fatal. One could only bear it occasionally. No wonder that, of my grandmother's fourteen children, seven lived into the late seventies, four into the nineties, while Grandmamma and her eldest daughter reached their hundred. People lived then, because noise and worry did not tear their lives to pieces: now-

adays we are told that they have a better expectation of life because, although torn to pieces, they are pepped up by medicine.

Then again there was a rather pleasing (I think) dichotomy of thought between respectability and duty on the one hand and the gay life on the other. Queen Victoria had placed her black German bonnet on England's head, and insisted on severity of morals. But Edward VII was coming along, and in spite of divorce courts and Tranby Crofts, represented a reaction against too much solemnity. The well-to-do, following Victorian or Quaker (or even, one might say, communist) principles, were expected to make some sacrifice and set some example. My aunts all belonged to the Charity Organisation Society or some such body and did their stints as required: my grandmother kept at Nutfield what was called a 'Fresh Air Home' - a roomy farmhouse in which thirty children from the slums were kept, month by month, throughout the year. At the same time a more indulgent eye was turned on Mrs Langtry and Mrs Keppel than posterity, more narrow-minded, found it possible, later, to turn on Mrs Simpson.

So life went on at Nutfield: very slowly, very gently, very serenely. My grandmother drew her wealth, at a remove, from the sweated industrial slaves of Lancashire: but that fact, in the then climate of opinion, did not register. The poor were poor, and the rich rich. Had not my grandfather infuriated his contemporaries by pushing the Ten Hours Bill, which saved the children from fourteen hours work? Could more be expected? In the context of the times it was a realistic view. My grandmother would have been prostrated with grief if anyone had even sought to convince her that her wealth flowed from misery. No one did anything of the kind, since no such views were current. You were wealthy and you lived accordingly. Today equality is the slogan, but there is no equality in nature. The Welfare State is an admirable project, but so long as it is national and not international it is only an extension of the same disparity between wealth and poverty. Fifty years ago individuals were rich or poor: today nations are rich or poor. The division of wealth and poverty becomes vertical instead of horizontal: at one time it is between rich and poor in all countries, at another, between rich countries and poor countries. The manual worker who draws his twenty pounds a week is exactly as innocent or guilty as my grandmother was innocent or guilty: he does not think of the coolie or the ryot any more than my grandmother thought of Lancashire.

But human beings continue to live off one another, and in the process somebody must lose. Just as my grandmother and her class were taxed out of existence to benefit the English working classes, so the English working classes will be overtaken by the millions of Africans and Indians and Chinese who are still compelled to live at a lower level. Once you start equalization, the wheel runs on until, at some point, you revert again to natural inequality.

Old men, such as I am, doubtless always look wistfully towards the good old days, and angry young men curse them. The process is repeated in every generation, and always greeted as something quite new. In my young days there was a tag (now thought repulsive) about 'knowing one's place'. It's not a bad thing to know. If you know your place and stay there you may be fairly happy. If the only place that anyone knows is the front seat of a Rolls Royce with a mink coat and a television set and a large income, the rat-race is bound to be ferocious. So I shall continue, unrepentantly, to think that, all in all, Nutfield was a happier human community than any I see in England now.

However, I have attempted to describe only a comparatively wealthy community in a time of prosperity. Had I been born in the slums of Manchester, I should undoubtedly think that life had greatly improved today. We are all victims of circumstance: and until civilization reaches a point at which every child born on earth is assured of food, warmth, and shelter from the cradle to the grave, all thinking about wealth and poverty, justice and injustice, privilege and equality, will be muddled thinking. I am biased by my experience, but then, so is everyone else.

Chapter Two

What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?

RECRUITING PLACARD 1914

HAVE NO FEAR: this is not a book of war. The war of 1914 has been described with great eloquence by gifted writers and poets: in that it differs from the war of 1939, which has been chronicled at great length by soldiers and statesmen. The 1914 war flamed up suddenly into a crusading fire for a peaceful but still adventurous generation: the 1939 war was a thunderstorm already expected by people depressed by clouds. I cannot exclude 1914, because my life, like that of many, was completely changed by it.

Harried by white feathers, patriotic songs, and candid friends, I joined the Artists Rifles. I did not do so because I thought that they were artists, but because their headquarters happened to be round the corner, and also because I hoped that the name would annoy my father. It was in fact a good deal rougher than anything I had anticipated. I was five foot five inches when I left Eton. In the ensuing year I grew to six foot two. I was therefore a gangling youth, with small physical reserves: the long route marches every day, with a heavy pack and a rifle which seemed to bore into my thin shoulder blades, were exhausting: I found it difficult to keep awake on guard duty at night.

In July 1914, 'shirking' camp, I had escaped to Nutfield. There, at breakfast at the round table, I heard of the declaration of war. It did not then seem to have anything to do with me: another war for the Army. My grandmother said something like 'Dear, dear!' or 'It doesn't signify'; Aunt Una remarked that probably Anthony would have to go to France. We were only three: Aunt Sarah was married to her clergyman: Aunt Gertrude had gone off to found a Rest Home for Nurses at Eastbourne. Nutfield was very peaceful. All my thoughts were on the coming glories of Oxford, where I should become a Fellow of All Souls, and live a quiet life for ever. Destiny had other plans.

After a week or so, I had to return to my parents' house at Kington, a singularly unattractive mansion which my father had

bought in order to be near the kennels of the Warwickshire Hunt. It was in fact so near that the stink of them was ever-present. Here the pressure grew apace. Every post brought me letters from Eton friends who had joined this or that crack regiment, and invited me to do the same. Conversation seemed to centre exclusively on the necessity that all 'able-bodied' young men should join up. (How I wished to be a cripple!) My uncle commanded the Brigade of Guards and offered a commission. Since I remained mutinous, even Aunt Sarah was called from her rectory. To my surprise and horror, she added herself to the pressures. 'You must join up for the sake of England.' I remained obstinate: was life to be just a return to an eternal OTC?

One evening my father said, 'You will be in the hall at eight o'clock tomorrow morning, and I shall take you to Epsom, where you will join the Public Schools Battalion.' I said, 'No.' My father repeated: 'You will be in the hall at eight o'clock tomorrow morning.' I was in the hall at eight o'clock tomorrow morning. In the train, after an interval (reserved first-class carriage) my father said, 'If you join up today, I will see that after the war you lack for nothing: I will engage myself to pay you £2,000 a year, and you can do what you like.' I said miserably, 'And if I don't?' 'If you don't,' replied my father, 'I shall put you into a third-class business house and cut you off with a shilling.' I wondered what he meant by a third-class business house: did he know himself? Better than soldiering, perhaps. I was too young to think about the shilling. The £2,000 a year had no attractions: I was sure that, if I became a soldier, I should be killed.

At Epsom I was measured, weighed, medically examined, asked questions and then invited to sign a form. I refused. There was a shameful pause. My poor father (it makes me sad to think of it) pulled himself together and said, 'Well, if he won't, he won't: we all have our different views.' We travelled back in silence. The next day I ran away to London, where a more or less pacifist aunt gave me an attic to sleep in. But it was no use: the climate of opinion had me gripped.

The staggering losses in France soon made the Artists Rifles, like other such bodies, a source of potential officers. Early in December 1914, I found myself a second lieutenant in the gunners. This seemed at least out of the fire into the frying-pan: I thought that an officer's life would be smoother, and gunnery perhaps interesting. I was sent for training to Harwich and then

Lydd. It was a cold winter: neither resort was exactly gay. At Harwich we were placed under Major Hammersley, a Kitchener-like figure with no conversation and much wrath. He had us up at 6 a.m. to service the guns. This meant, among other things, picking up a hundred-pound shell, icy, slippery, and covered with mud, balancing it on the left forearm, and thrusting into the breech, getting one's hand away before, as Major Hammersley grimly said, he took off the back of it with his ramrod. I need hardly say that I dropped the shells on my frozen toes, on the floor, on the gun, anywhere but in the breech, and had my blue hands skinned. We did regular night watches, eight to twelve, twelve to four, four to eight: sad solitary stints, with the gun-crews calling through the cold night: 'Tide, four foot fall, falling.' Hammersley made us stand at opposite corners of a huge field, and bawl commands: the silly man had no idea of voice production, and thought (like so many military gentlemen) that shouting meant strength. All our voices became whispers, and I lost mine for good and all: I could never again sing a note in tune: and for that I curse Hammersley and all his stupid clan. He robbed me of a great pleasure in life through sheer ignorance.

Lydd, though a waste of frozen shingle, was a little better. Here we were allowed to play with what were then monster guns, running on rails: and some ballistic science was forced into our brains (though never much into mine). To my unspeakable fury, I was then sent back to Landguard Port, on the other side of the Harwich estuary. I don't know what I had expected, but not that. It was just dreary. One evening a sergeant poked his head into the mess, where some majors and colonels were snoring, while a few subalterns knocked billiard balls about, and said: 'Volunteers wanted for Eastern Mediterranean.' No one took any notice. I did not dare to speak. Mediterranean? If I was to be killed, I might at least see that. I sidled out, and caught up with the sergeant on the rainy catwalk. 'What did you say?' He repeated it gruffly. I said, 'Put me down.' He said, 'Better come into the office.' I followed him. 'It may be rough,' he suggested. I did not know if he was referring to the sea. I repeated: 'Put me down.'

My orders arrived almost instantly. I was to sail from Wharf Number So-and-So from Liverpool on such-and-such date. Secrecy was not such as it became in the next war. I could get to Liverpool as I liked. I had forty-eight hours. My father and stepmother (it seems queer now) decided to accompany me. There

was a great crowd at Euston station, cheering and waving flags. At Rugby my small stepsister met me to say goodbye. I was sure that I was off to my death, but it was all very exciting. I presumed that I should travel on a cattle-boat in great discomfort, but even that did not matter. My parents were pleased: they were 'giving their only son': the right thing to do. In the dusk I slipped through the dock gates at Liverpool.

A great surprise awaited me. I found myself gazing up at the iron cliffs of the largest ship I had ever seen. It was the *Olympic*, and on her I was to travel. It was a thousand times more exciting than anything I had dreamed of. I was delighted: all regrets vanished. I joined the long queue going up the gangways, and, after a long shuffle, reached the Embarkation Officer's desk. He riffled through his papers and said, 'I can't find any trace of your name: come back in three hours.' (This always happens to me: I am never on any list.) I milled around, and noted that there was a huge number of troops on board: I believe it was seven thousand. I realized that, after all, it might be very uncomfortable. But, I said to myself, this is the *Olympic* and she is White Star Line. I went down the gangway and into the White Star Offices opposite. They knew all about me there: I guess my stepmother had seen to that. Without any fuss they gave me a cabin ticket: B 47. Privilege, how nice. I went on board again and was ushered into a Louis XV suite with bath. It was a bit too much. I noticed that the adjacent doors were labelled with the names of generals. I wondered if I could get away with it, and feared not. I made my way to the bar, and there, after a careful reconnaissance, discovered a colonel who seemed pleasant. His name was Maurice Holmes. After a drink or two, I asked him what sort of accommodation he had. 'Lousy!' he replied. I said, 'I find myself, by some mistake I suppose, in . . .' I took him to B 47. He was delighted and had his baggage moved in immediately. 'Don't worry, it'll be quite all right,' he assured me. And it was. We travelled in millionaire comfort.

My spirits soared sky-high. I was away from Fether, away from the dreary routines of Harwich and Lydd, going south. Nothing mattered. Maurice Holmes was a perfect companion, witty and intelligent, with what seemed to me a vast experience of life. He was a great raconteur and I listened enthralled to his stories. He threw middle-aged cold water on my enthusiasms, but I did not mind. 'I suppose you know,' he said, 'that you'll have a hell of a time on Gallipoli.' I said that I didn't care: it would

be better than England. 'Shall I tell you,' he said, '*why* you don't care?' I said, 'Tell away!' He said, 'Because you think you'll be able to tell the waitress in the ABC shop all about it when you get back - *if* you do!' I thought this was a bit unfair, but wondered if there were a germ of truth in it.

We passed Gibraltar and I took photographs. In those days there was nothing against that. We sailed on under cloudless skies. The isles of Greece! And then suddenly we were at anchor in Mudros, and everything was terrible. Mudros was bare and hot and hideous. Maurice Holmes disembarked, fortunate fellow, for Egypt. I saw him down the gangway and felt alone. With a herd of others I was rowed in a caique to the *Arcadian*, the headquarters ship which was popularly supposed to be aground on empty champagne bottles. I was handed a ticket (which I still by some marvel possess) '2nd Lieut. Fielden, to embark this evening for Cape Helles'. Suddenly, I was for it. I cast about madly for means to evade my fate. A soldier on the *Olympic* had attempted to cut his throat with an army razor, but had fumbled it. When I asked him why, he said: 'I signed on for Home service only, and I ain't going to Gallipoli.' Should I do something of the kind? (He got seven years penal servitude.) But there was no time. Soon I was chugging in a tug through the dusk.

It was very quiet and very dark. We were instructed not to smoke, not to show a light, and not to talk. The tug glided on over the oily water. Indian sepoy stifled hacking coughs. Once we bumped and slid over something. 'The wreck of the *Majestic*,' said the skipper. Turkish searchlights from Chanak began to sweep across our path. Presently we were wading ashore in darkness. Baggage was somehow sorted out. There were gun flashes from the north east and from the south: Troy. We were piled into a dugout with our sleeping-bags. I suppose we slept.

In the morning a staff-captain said: 'You to So-and-So, you to Such-and-Such: Fielden to Eighth Corps Trench Mortars.' I broke into a cold sweat: this was much worse than anything I had anticipated. Trench mortars, of which I knew nothing, were called 'The Suicide Club'. Surely this could not happen to me! 'There'll be somebody coming down to fetch you,' said the Staff-Captain. 'You can ride, I suppose?' I said that I could ride. I sat on the beach and waited. Out at sea there was a hospital ship. I wondered whether, if I swam out to her and arrived exhausted, I should be taken away to somewhere else. Probably not. With

great inexactitude I visualized, behind the small hills behind me, a sort of otc camp. And a very dangerous one.

After what seemed an interminable wait, a man cantered up, leading a second horse. This was Douglas, a grand fellow who was to be with me for a long time. I mounted, and off we went. Douglas said, 'I'd better lead, sir, it's a bit tricky.' It was. He went swiftly ahead in a cloud of dust, and I followed. Suddenly he shouted back at me, 'Have to gallop here, sir, Asiatic Annie's got this taped.' We galloped. Then he turned right and disappeared. My horse followed. I found myself in a small gully. To right and left, there were men and horses in dug-out bays: in front, astonishingly, was a little low house built of stone with a sandbagged roof, thrust into and level with a slight rise in the land. Three officers, standing outside it, gave me a friendly welcome. Calvert, who commanded the unit, was spare, quiet, nervous: Williams was round-faced, chubby, gay: Peake was grizzled and grandfatherly, a ranker officer who was a sort of nannie to everyone. Both Peake and Williams were shortly to be killed.

I was handed a whisky-and-soda. In those days, whatever else went short, a whisky-and-soda was *de rigueur* in every officer's mess. You offered it to every guest and you drank it with every guest whether you liked it or not. We went into the little house, where there was just room for the four of us to sit round a table made from crates. Bully beef, slightly curried, and army biscuits, were put before us. This was the staple Gallipoli fare, which hardly ever changed. The difficulty of landing stores was so great that fresh food seldom got as far as the trenches, and none of us, during my time at least, ever received a parcel or a letter. Personally I found the bully beef and biscuits excellent. I was delighted: it was not, after all, anything like an otc camp.

While we were eating, a 5.9 howitzer shell whined over us and burst with a shattering explosion just outside the hut. We were protected by the stone walls, and the men in the unit, in their dug-out bays, were untouched. But eight men of a Scottish infantry regiment, who were drawing water from a pipe, had a direct hit: and all were killed. We ran out: in the swirling smoke was a heap of bodies. And they were screaming. The scream of a human male, when you hear it for the first time, is a devastating sound. Williams and I picked up a man who was waving his arms: he came up like a feather: both his legs had been severed. I staggered back. Williams glanced at me and said, 'Go into the

hut: you aren't used to this kind of thing yet.' I did not go in: but I was useless. A man was laid down at my feet: he had had his liver blown away. Into the bloody mess Borg, the Maltese cook, poured a bottle of iodine. The man kept repeating, 'Och! they've done for me this time.' My hair rose on my scalp. Yet, a few days later, that became a joke in the unit, and at every whine of shell or bullet, we would say, 'Och! they've done for me this time.' One soon becomes inured to death.

Trench mortars were unpleasant and unpopular. We used in the main what was known as the 'Japanese Bomb Howitzer'. It was a glorified mechanical catapult. Shaky and imprecise, it sent up from the bottom of a trench, a fat, 100 lb bomb, generally known as a 'flying pig', which soared slowly into the air and fell down within a very short range. The idea was that with such a high trajectory it spelt blue murder if it fell into an enemy trench. And so it did. The only trouble was that it was quite apt to fall back into one's own. From the first shot it was obvious to everyone, and instantly attracted an enemy barrage. Therefore the infantry groaned when we appeared.

Like everyone else on Gallipoli, I got dysentery. Dysentery in Gallipoli provided a curious example of human adaptability. Since almost everyone had it, and almost everyone could not, obviously, go to hospital, it had perforce to be played down. One fainted on the way to the latrine, was picked up by one's batman, put on the stool, and fainted again after shooting out blood and pus: then, after an hour or so, one resumed duty. There was a plentiful supply of chlorodyne which one swallowed thankfully. There was no heroism about it: it became a nuisance like the common cold in England, or malaria in India. Occasionally someone died, as they may die from malaria or pneumonia, but mostly we recovered and relapsed and recovered again. But we were not exactly the better for it. I have often wondered how far dysentery alone was responsible for our failure in Gallipoli. It certainly sapped vitality.

Nobody, I think, hoped or expected that we should ever 'take' Achi Baba, the low hill held by the Turks some four miles from the beach. The classic stalemate in France had set the pattern of war. You held your own trenches if you could, and occasionally made an advance of a hundred yards: that was about all. The distant goal of Constantinople had become a farcical idea. You did your job and saved your skin, if you could.

The days passed, and eventually one of them brought the

news that Anzac and Suvla had been evacuated. Hope flared up: surely we must go too. But very soon a document arrived. I always wish that I had kept a copy of it: so far as I know, it has never been published. It was a grandiloquent effusion, of which I now only remember a few words. 'The positions at Anzac and Suvla Bay have now been successfully evacuated . . . but that at Cape Helles will not only be maintained, but strengthened by strong reinforcements from the Ninth Army . . . battalion after battalion of the Turkish Army has been mown down before you, and Cape Helles has become known to the Turks as the "Slaughter House" . . . we will go on . . .' I suppose that this document was issued in order that it should fall into Turkish hands and mask our evacuation. Strangely enough, we believed it. We believed it all the more because units of the Ninth Army did arrive, and passed through our gully. Our spirits sank to zero: we were on Gallipoli for ever. It must have been a very successful piece of propaganda.

Soon, however, we were ordered to 'report to the beach for fatigues'. More significantly, we were instructed to 'burn all papers'. (Even then, though we began to hope that *we* were destined to leave, we did not yet believe in a full-scale evacuation.) The burning of papers was not an easy job. Smoke (except by night), and glow (except by day), had to be avoided. Calvert and I, the only two remaining officers, crouched over a brazier which was constantly dowsed with water. Calvert was now in a profound state of depression, because his wife, whom he adored, was expecting a first child and he had no news. This made him largely indifferent to what went on.

The men of the unit were, without exception, old soldiers of some ten years service. They were tough. Curiously enough, and to my own great surprise, I got on well with them. They thought me a comic sort of baby, but the queer feeling that I was a gent carried enormous weight. Was it a bad feeling? I don't know now. I only know that they never let me down, and always, while I was with them for the years of the war, they nursed me through every crisis and never failed in their loyalty. I owed them an enormous debt, and I salute any of them who may read this.

The evacuation of Cape Helles was the most dramatic event that I shall ever know. Only very slowly did we get around to the idea that the whole Army was leaving. And with that knowledge came terrors, elastic stretching of the nerves. The beaches

were enfiladed by the Turkish guns in Troy, and every five minutes or so a salvo would explode. It was known now that the front line was held more and more thinly, and that the Turks could quite easily descend on the beaches. It was said, perhaps intentionally, that the Turks castrated and tortured prisoners. A horrid fear was engendered: a horrid fear that one might get left. On one occasion I was sent up to a distant gully to fetch something: I remember my sweaty panic: I should be wounded by some stray shell, at the mercy of the Turks.

At nights we worked on the loading of guns and ammunition. The sea, at first calm, began to be rough. It became difficult to load heavy stuff on to lighters in the surf. On one unforgettable night, the Navy sent all our lighters back from Tenedos, saying that the sea was too rough to unload them. The remarks about the Navy were unprintable, and I cherish an anger to this day. They could have taken the lighters somewhere: the last thing was to send them back to the beaches. We had to unload them and push the stuff into the cliff caves again.

Our last night arrived. We were instructed to stand by for embarkation. We sat on W beach. We now knew that there was no one in the front line and that the plop-plop of rifles, dimly heard, was caused by their automatic discharge through sand-weighting of the triggers. There was nobody at all between us and the Turkish Army. The men were nervous. Calvert had retreated into a melancholy of his own, walking up and down and muttering. On our left were the ruins of the fort of Sedd-ul-Bahr, and on them a French *poilu* was perched, giving a shrill trumpet-blast every time that he saw the flash of the guns in Asia. Eighteen seconds elapsed before the shells arrived. Eighteen seconds one counted. Then there would be a flash and a roar: and a scuttering of men and mules. In front of us was the beached steamer, the *River Clyde*: with a bridge of boats connecting her with the shore. Every now and then a voice called through the darkness 'Unit 304, down to the boats'. Men ran: the trumpet shrilled: the shells exploded. Out at sea, red lights moved. At 4 a.m. our turn came. We ran down, and across the bridge of boats. As we were running, the trumpet shrilled. The shells fell on either side of the bridge, deluging us. Then we were running through the *Clyde*, were on the tug, were putting out to sea. Calvert, hysterical, stood on the bridge and laughed: 'There they go, and we are off!!' Soon we were on a deck crowded with sleeping figures. Happy, I slept.

Interlude in Egypt. This is fine. The retreat from Gallipoli is as disorganised, though in a different and less critical way, as the retreat from Dunkirk twenty-five years later. The Gallipoli army, flung on to the beaches of Alexandria, stays there, for the most part, for six months. Perhaps Authority is uncertain about redeployment - Salonika, Alexandretta (there are rumours of another landing there), Palestine, Mesopotamia, Italy, France, India? Or perhaps transport and equipment is lacking. A small unimportant unit like ours was forgotten altogether. We had no orders and Calvert was indifferent: the men were free to amuse themselves in Alexandria, which swiftly became a very gay city. My uncle by marriage, Dr William Hunter, had arrived in Cairo after dealing with typhus in Serbia: and my very enchanting aunt had joined him there. Moodily Calvert agreed that I could go. I found myself in a luxury suite at Shepherds Hotel. Beatrice Hunter was pretty, amusing, intelligent, and a keen Egyptologist: she was a friend of Quibell, the Curator of the Museum. She took me in hand and whisked me through museums, bazaars, mosques, and down to Luxor. Suddenly, as one who awakes, my eyes were opened to man-made beauty. The sleek regal cats, the tragic handsome Pharaohs, the great lotus columns of the temples, the iridescent tear-bottles, the scarabs, the jewels, the mummies in their painted coffins, filled me with a new delight. And Shepherds was gay; full of laughing people: nobody seemed a whit depressed by the Gallipoli fiasco. The sun poured down: every moment was a new experience: I was alive: I was nineteen, and life was grand.

After a month, Calvert recalled me. He was departing, and the unit was to be merged in a new siege battery under a Major Burrows. Our first chore was to dig gun replacements for coast defence. It was an easy, undemanding job: nobody worked very hard: there was a limpid sea to bathe in, and we unearthed a beautiful Roman pavement. Burrows was a Theosophist and introduced me to the works of Madame Blavatsky and Mrs Annie Besant. Having been close to sudden death, I had had some thoughts about an after-life: and I found Theosophy thrilling. (For two years, despite Army fare, I lived on a vegetarian diet and wrote down all my nightly experiences on the Astral Plane. Then I forgot all about it). I cannot say that my contribution to winning the war was very great at this time: indeed I never thought about the war at all. In the 1914 war, as in others before it, that was a possible thing to do.

Along with many others of my generation and immediate experience, I was, not perhaps surprisingly, in a mood of rather exalted romanticism. Like a curtain falling on the first act of a play, the Gallipoli adventure, brief, vivid, abrupt, had cut me off from the sheltered life of parents, teachers and humdrum development. I had commanded men, escaped death, gained confidence, and discovered an entirely new world. I was young, tall, slim, and, as far as I could gather, not ugly. I had never had sexual relations with anyone, and my virginity teased me: partly, perhaps, because there was a good deal of bragging about sexual prowess among the troops in Egypt then. But at nineteen (at any rate in my case) thoughts about sex are apt to soar into cloud-cuckoo-land, and physical facts are mistled over by romance.

In the evenings in Alexandria, I used to sit alone (the habit of solitude being always with me) on the balcony of the Mohammed Ali Club, a luxurious institution to which all officers could belong. It was a splendid place for one who preferred the stalls to the stage: from it one looked directly down the Bond Street of Alexandria, the rue Cherif Pasha. Egypt was then at the height of its exotic dazzle as a meetingplace of East and West, and the street was one of the most colourful places in the world. Soldiers, mostly young, were everywhere – British, French, Italian, Senegalese, Indian, Gurkha, Australian. Greek, Italian and Egyptian civilians, moneyed by army pickings, swept past in what then seemed sleek cars or sparkling carriages. Even poverty, in the guise of street-vendors or beggars or dragomen, dressed in gaudy rags, appeared glamorous and gay. The slanting sun touched the crowd with a red glitter. It was my first view of the East. I did not come to it, like the hero of Conrad's *Youth*, from a devastating shipwreck, but I did come from the beaches of Gallipoli, and its brilliance enfevered me. I felt as if I had been transported on a magic carpet into an Arabian Nights Entertainment. Adventure, surely, must await me.

Through the glitter and movement of the street there came, every evening at the same hour, like some royal barge cleaving through a crowded waterway, an equipage which outshone all others. It was a victoria drawn by grey horses, and it seemed to me the perfection of elegance. From spokes to shafts it was so polished that it might have been of ebony: silver bridles, silver lamps, silver hubs, shimmered against the black. In it, alone, sat a woman who to my innocent eyes appeared the most dazzling creature in creation. (And so potent was the spell that, across

nearly fifty years, I feel its thrill.) The lady was dressed, always differently, with a sumptuousness which fell just short, but not very far short, of vulgarity. Diamonds glittered under a low-swept hat from which ospreys or ostrich feathers curled. I thought her a mixture of Lady Deadlock, La Dame aux Camelias, and Rider Haggard's She. I also thought her remote as the stars: I was worshipping a goddess from afar. But my heart leapt up to the victoria more than it would have done to any daffodil. Each evening I was bewitched.

Suddenly the eyes of the goddess flashed in my direction. I turned round to see at what or whom they might be flashing: I could see nothing. I moved my chair so that I was alone, next day, in a corner of the balcony. This time, unmistakably, there was a smile. I could not believe it. She has, I thought, mistaken me for some acquaintance. Nevertheless my legs, one evening, carried me down the steps and set me walking after the victoria. Did it stop? It did. And, as I came up to it, the goddess leaned out and extending a small gloved hand, said (what an anticlimax) '*Bonsoir, mon ami*'. And in a flurry of silk and lace she descended, and walked into a teashop. I, innocent idiot, walked on. Doubtless there was a cackle of laughter from Olympus.

Why did I walk away? Shyness, ignorance, innocence? Or did I not really wish to meet the goddess face to face? At this distance I cannot tell. But the result was to arouse her attention – and resentment. Next day and on days following, as I walked to or from the club, the victoria drew in to the curb beside me, and the greys, slow-stepping, walked at my pace. I looked away. To become the pursued rather than the pursuer was, to my young mind, something of an affront.

Clearly it could not stop there. With infinite caution (so I imagined) I sat at the bar of the Mohammed Ali club and chatted with the barman. He, like all his species, knew about everything and everybody in social-sexual circles. With great tact (so I supposed) I got around to the victoria. He laughed. 'You mean that trollop Marica? A good bint, but she's married to a Turk and kept by old Achmed Bey: anyway, she's slept with everyone in Alex. Better watch your step.' I was dismayed but not convinced. Barman's gossip, I thought. It did not match my vision: I would not believe it. A few days later the victoria passed me, and in it, with Marica, sat Gourlay. Gourlay was fat and florid and vulgar: the most repulsive subaltern in Egypt. It seemed

incredible that he should sit beside the goddess. He had, by some chance, I said to myself, been introduced to her, and she was graciously giving him a lift. A day or two later I cornered him, and – with a brash stupidity – said, ‘Did you have a nice drive with Marica?’ He looked at me with contempt. ‘A naice drive,’ he mimicked me. ‘I had a jolly good grind, if that’s what you mean.’ With those words a goddess fell with an almighty thud into limbo. Suddenly I was in a mad rage, not only with Marica and all her sex, but also with my own stupidity, ignorance, and failure. I rushed into the brothels of Alexandria. They were legion, and (in the absence then of cinema and radio) the most usual form of distraction for the troops; I wanted, I suppose, to revenge myself on Marica and on all women. Like a dipsomaniac who is weaned from alcohol by overwhelming and sickening doses, I procured a satiety which revolted me. Women, I decided, had nothing to do with romantic love.

This partly romantic, partly squalid, episode is germane to my story for two reasons. In the first place it is true, and strange, and still vivid: in the second, it may have considerably deflected my life. I do not know – nor does anyone else – when and why homosexuality occurs: perhaps the Marica muddle was a symptom rather than a cause. Freud says that you can never make a homosexual into a heterosexual, and vice versa: that the pattern is fixed at birth. But sometimes, when I hear people talking about the dangers of the ‘corruption’ of the young by homosexuals, I wonder how far the heterosexual young may also be ‘corrupted’ by the wrong kind of woman. Heterosexuality also has its perversions. Had I had a romantic affair with Marica at that romantic moment of youth, my attitude to women might have been a different one: as it was, I was romantically bruised about women in general, and the two years of all-male society, then a part of war, which followed, did not help to correct my estrangement.

While this was going on, I had embarked on another and different activity. Hugh Buckler – perhaps that was his name, I cannot now be sure – was an Australian actor-manager who had a perfectly correct idea that, in the absence of other diversions, the largest theatre in Alexandria could be filled to capacity by almost any tribe. I became, God knows why, a member of his repertory company. We staggered through a mass of plays, *The School for Scandal*, *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, *The Rivals*, *His House in Order*, *The Truth*, *The Gay Lord Quex*. We must have

been frightful. It did not matter: the house was always full: we got tumultuous applause: we even got flattering notices in the local press. Hugh was a good producer and a bully. He would keep us up all night, sitting away at the top of the gallery and shouting 'What's this? A funeral? Start the scene again!' or 'Not a single word have I heard: start again!' or 'Can't you use your legs? Are you paralysed? Walk straight down stage!' or 'Put your voice up, up, up! Hey, come out to the front and put your voice up!' He frightened me so much that I scarcely knew what I was doing when on stage, but he did give me back the use of my speaking, though not my singing, voice.

All this came to an abrupt end when I was ordered to Sollum. It was just as well that I was. I was very nearly on the mat with Major Edwards, who had succeeded Burrows. He thought that I did not work, and his thought was right. I did not deserve Sollum, but it fell into my lap. Sollum had been the scene of a dashing little exploit by the Duke of Westminster – at least he figured as the hero – against the Senussi, and a holding operation, known as the Western Frontier Force, was put in there. I was promoted to captain, and put in charge of a half-battery of captured German howitzers. With me (I cannot now think why) came the men of the trench mortar unit. I had one subaltern under me. I also had a pair of horses. I was, more or less, on my own. As often happens – perhaps as always happens – responsibility made me a much better man.

Sollum was altogether a lucky dip for me. Many people might have been bored by it, but, if you like deserts, as I do, Sollum is (or was) a Paradise. The bay, twenty-five miles across, sweeps round in a scimitar curve of silver sand, and from it red cliffs rush up eight hundred feet to flat desert above. In the little port the water, emerald green, is so clear that you can see a rusty anchor two hundred feet below. I had little to do save for keeping the guns in trim and organising practise shoots round the perimeter. For the first time I enjoyed riding: there was nobody to tell me what to do and I was quite at home in the saddle. I used to gallop by myself over the desert which never changed, except for the mirages, unbelievably complete with palms and minarets and gleaming water, shifting into nothing as one approached them. I found the strange old Roman wells, dry vaulted caverns which must once have collected water, and, with the aid of our instruments, plotted maps of the area. I played water-polo with the men in the translucent sea, and got much

ducked for my pains: but I had become a good swimmer. With my subaltern, Caldwell, who was a Roman Catholic, I argued much about religion with no result. I went out on a minesweeper, and for the first time heard that extraordinary thing, Marconi's wireless – a voice actually speaking over the water at a distance of a mile! And I fell in love with a blond young man called Steed, who seemed to me Sir Galahad. I would no more have declared my love than I would have screamed in church: and I don't suppose I saw Steed more than a dozen times, and always on formal occasions – a meal in an officer's mess, a military exercise, a foray with the Camel Corps, a walk with the tame gazelles which he kept. And I never saw him again. But I needed to love, not to be loved: and my love gave a shimmer to Sollum.

It did not last, of course: I should have liked it to last for the duration of the war. After six months, I was ordered, with my men, to join a battery in Palestine. The move was not only unpleasant: it was also, for me, terrifying. I was well aware that it was one thing to command a small unit in the back of befuff, and quite another to be a captain in a battery of the front line. I did not think I could do it: and therefore I couldn't. I swiftly became the worst captain in the British Army. Not only was I an abject physical coward, throwing myself into a dugout or slit-trench whenever we were bombarded, and telling a subaltern to take over: I was also grossly incompetent in all my duties. The captain of a battery was then (I don't know what he is now) the pivot of the unit: the major commanding was usually taken up with administrative duties, visits to headquarters, plotting of future moves, discussions of range and barrage with infantry commanders, and so on. The subalterns were controlled by the captain. I controlled nothing: I was a figure of fun. I deserved to be shot out with ignominy: but Major Bagnall, who commanded the battery, was a man of extraordinary patience and kindness, and he was not going to let down his captain, however bad. His tolerance made me the more ashamed, and perhaps worse. Shielded by him, I did less and less. I was about the worst soldier in the world.

Then, suddenly, things changed. Bagnall was given red tabs and taken to headquarters. In his place came a Major who was – and it is saying quite a lot – even worse than I was. He was, I think, a sick man: a pale little squirt, with no authority and no decision. He was terrified of everybody and everything. Perhaps Bagnall had subtly educated me: perhaps I felt a surge of re-

sponsibility. Almost overnight I changed. My cowardice fell away like the Albatross: I felt perfectly capable of running the battery. Quite quickly I became an efficient officer. And then the Major was wounded or fell sick: I don't now remember which. He disappeared, and, *faute de mieux* I suppose, I became co, and presently was exalted to temporary major. I began to enjoy the war. The battery was my pride, and I took great pleasure in seeing that it was efficient. But I had reckoned without the Brigade Commander, Colonel Moore. He – probably for good reasons – detested me, and wished to get me out. Through the grapevine of my still loyal trench mortar men, I came to know that he wished to replace me by a protégé named Burns. And I was now subjected to a sort of witch hunt. Moore would descend on the battery at all hours, ply me with questions, examine my reports and returns, be present when the battery moved, watching me. Presently he sent a complaint to headquarters, saying that my ammunition returns were inaccurate. (So they were: you cannot keep on firing shells and at the same time have your ammunition returns up-to-date.) I was summoned to headquarters. There was an odd parallel with my summons by Lyttleton at Eton. I had prepared – oh fool! – a brief to show that the battery had been efficient under my command. The General, like Lyttleton, cut me short. 'I think,' he said, 'you are a little young to command a battery: so I shall transfer you.' I walked across the yard of the farm with the Staff Captain, and had difficulty in controlling my tears. He slapped me on the back. 'Come. I'll give you a drink,' he suggested, 'these things happen to everybody.' Gratefully I swallowed the whisky, but I was humiliated, ashamed, and enraged. I had come to love the battery and the men: at one fell unjustified swoop, I was treated as a criminal. From that moment, perhaps, began in me a pathological hatred of all Little Men in Authority. In later years, I had it out with the General. He said, 'What could I do? Go against my Brigadier? And where would that have ended? What did it matter to me?'

Demoted again to captain, I was sent to a 'Derby' battery on the coast. 'Derby' men were then regarded as conscripts, and thought poorly of. I was of the same opinion. I loathed the battery and its officers and men. I was desperately unhappy. But my unhappiness – or my experience – had cancelled out both cowardice and laziness. With no pleasure, I did my job with efficiency. I had learned the rigmarole and could carry it out

I was a quite good captain, but in my heart I wanted to howl. One day I was called to the telephone by HQ. Bagnall was on the line. He said, 'The General wants to know how you are getting on?' I said, ungraciously, 'You must know perfectly well that I'm not getting on at all.' He said 'Happy?'. I said: 'No, sir.' After a pause, he asked: 'Would you care to come to Headquarters, the General says?' Ungratefully I replied, 'Anything better than this.'

I found myself working under a Major Armstrong, who was called Counter Battery Staff Officer. Counter battery work of those days would in these seem ridiculous. Nevertheless it was the greatest fun, and admirably suited my capacities. The aim of it was to find and silence enemy batteries. For this purpose we had ten telephones, a huge map, and the power to ask the Royal Air Force to take photographs. The ten telephones, at which one or other of us were in attendance night and day, were connected with various points in the front line: if *one* enemy battery opened fire, the observer would give us, as best he could, a rough bearing by ear. When several of these bearings came in, we criss-crossed the strings on our map (each leading from an observer's post) and guessed the position of the battery. Then we would ask the RAF to photograph the map square. With a jewellers' lens we studied the photographs. It was a Heath Robinson procedure by the standards of today: yet long practise soon made us expert in it. Armstrong went away and I took his place. I had become so accustomed to the job that I had a quite accurate (I was later able to check it) idea of where the enemy batteries were. I developed almost a sixth sense about it. In the back of my mind, I knew that some enemy battery had not fired for some time and must have moved. A couple of bearings would tell me that that was the six-inch in AQ 5 - 17; and quite often, turning one of our own batteries on to it - could silence it.

For the first, and last, time in my army career I had a sense of achievement. I had an idea that I was doing something which fitted me, and which I could do well. Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that I was comparatively safe (for, although I had learnt not to flinch disgracefully from high explosive, I did not care for it), and partly to the freedom from commanding men, a chore which has never appealed to me. I am often surprised by the apparent desire of many human beings to have authority over others: I dislike it quite as much as I dislike the authority of others over me. Then again - since I was pacifist-

mind – I pleased myself with the notion that I was engaged in defence and not offence: I was protecting, as far as I could, our men from enemy gunfire. This is the classic rationalization of aggression as a means of defence: and, of course, nonsense. I did not stop to think that I was helping to kill enemy gunners: had I done so, I should, I suppose, have fallen back on the hoary old argument, 'Well, they started it.'

About a year before this, in my first and very unhappy days in Palestine, the poets had begun to invade my mind. I discovered by chance that the more difficult poems of Browning, *Sordello*, *Paracelsus*, *The Ring and the Book*, could banish my trembling fear under gunfire: and I gradually began to accumulate volumes. Bit by bit, mostly through periodicals, I came to know the then modern poets, Brooke, Blunden, Owen, Sassoon, Sorley: and they made me rejoice. Somebody somewhere was clothing in words my own detestation of war. The habit of reading poetry grew on me and added a new dimension to my life. I wished that I could write it but knew that I had no talent. I also began, when I had a chance, to sketch and paint. I still have a few pictures done in Palestine: much better, alas, than anything I ever achieved later, when I had been to the Slade School. Under the influence of a congenial job, my mind began to wake up.

Since at this time of my life (and perhaps always) I had to have a hero to worship, I found one in Atkinson, the Staff Captain. He was a dour north-countryman: an admirable soldier of indomitable courage. It was the attraction of opposites, perhaps. It started when, one day, we were both in the front line, and I was trying, with the donkey's ears (double periscopes), to spot an enemy sniper. A german howitzer shell landed about three yards in front of me: the donkey's ears were blown away and I was buried in rubble. Emerging, I found Atkinson looking at me with distaste. 'Do you know,' he asked me, 'that you've gone quite pale? It's a very bad example to the men.' 'Well, damn it,' I spluttered, 'and so would you.' 'No,' he said. 'You must learn to control yourself.' A little later we were walking over an open stretch of ground between the reserve trenches and headquarters when a Turkish 'pipsqueak' battery spotted us, and thought it would have some fun with us. The three-pounder shells were small but noisy: one burst ahead of us, and then one behind. 'They've got us bracketed,' I said to Atkinson. 'Shouldn't we run?' My legs were trembling. Atkinson sat down on the ground,

and slowly unrolled one of his puttees. 'Do what you like,' he said. 'No Turkish pipsqueak is going to make me run.' For a moment I balanced precariously between my fear and his esteem. His esteem just won. And no more shells came. From that time Atkinson took a fatherly interest in me: he hoped to improve me, I think, and perhaps he did: but nothing could make me a good soldier.

Presently we began to prepare for the offensive of September 1918. This was enthralling, partly because it was a beautiful operation, partly because we were entrusted with what was a very well-kept secret. I had by now an almost unique knowledge of the enemy guns in our sector, and could see how they could be neutralized. We drew beautiful maps of the planned forward movements of our batteries and their subsequent ranges. I suppose that Allenby had an overwhelming superiority of men and guns and aeroplanes, and was bound to win his battle: perhaps that happens with almost all generals. But the feint with a thinly held line in Jordan, the secret movement of nearly the whole army to the coast, the sudden thrust and the wheeling movement which nearly – though not quite – trapped the whole Turkish Army, formed a very pretty piece of strategy. For a few weeks I enjoyed war.

On the evening before zero day, Atkinson and I thought – since our part of the work was finished – that we might pay a last visit to our respective batteries. The general, somewhat reluctantly, allowed us a car. We drove through the darkness up the new road which had been made, in preparation for the offensive, up to the front line. Missing our way, we drove straight in to the front line trench. We were thrown on to the parapet, and the car, with its engine nicely telescoped, stood straight on end. The infantry laughed a good deal. The car, ruined, was put under some brushwood, and we walked the six miles home. The general was not pleased. 'In future,' he said, 'you two will not go out together.' The next day, however, the army had moved far ahead, and I was filled with an overwhelming desire to see the country, now cleared, which I had long been studying from photographs. I asked the general if I might have a horse. With a not very good grace he assented, warning me to be careful of snipers. I trotted along in the glorious weather, very pleased with myself and life. One by one I found the battery sites which I had studied: sometimes without their guns, sometimes with: in two cases I discovered dummy wooden guns which had completely foxed me.

Towards evening I approached the site where I knew my old battery should be, saw it in the distance and waved: and at that moment the horse and myself fell into a deep Turkish dugout. We disappeared. The horse was staked and had to be shot: I got a slashing cut on the leg. When I got back to headquarters, the general was less angry than I had feared: he grunted and said, 'I suppose boys will be boys.'

Almost immediately we were asked to 'volunteer' for France. I do not know now whether this was a kind of overspill of panic from March, or whether, even in September 1918, the situation in France was still bad. It was obvious that we all had to 'volunteer', though I for one greatly regretted the glittering possibilities of Constantinople. Soon we were sailing from Alexandria for a destination unknown: and with T. E. Lawrence on board, a strange and very unsympathetic figure, wrapped in anger, about whom we had heard vague rumours, but whose acquaintance it did not seem worth cultivating. If we tried to speak to him, he was rude and boorish: so we left him alone. At that time, oddly enough, it did not occur to us that the war was coming to an end: we thought that we were going to spend years in France.

At Taranto we were put on to a train. There were four hundred of us, four to a third-class carriage of incredible filth, which meant that two slept on the seats and two on the floor. I was on the floor, of course. The journey actually lasted nine days. It was so rough that a hundred and fifty officers fell out on the way, stricken by various diseases. The rest of us arrived, somewhat battered, at Cherbourg. Here we were told that we were going to England, that our train would arrive at Waterloo at such-and-such time, and that we could send telegrams to our families announcing our arrival. This we did.

It was very strange, after three-and-a-half years, to see the English countryside again. I had mixed feelings about it. I had got used to sunshine, and England was drab and wet. At Waterloo there was a great crowd, and an orgy of kissing. Suddenly I found myself alone on the platform with another officer whom I knew slightly. Nobody had come to meet us. We sat on our valises, and talked. At first we said, 'They'll come presently.' Then we knew they wouldn't. We began to talk of the possibilities of taking an orange farm in Palestine: a nice country, we thought, and oranges seemed to grow easily: a little ploughing and manuring, and one picked them off the trees, crated them, and made a decent living. Presently, as the fog became thicker,

we felt that we had better go. I remembered an astringent spinster aunt who lived in Hill Street, was wealthy and not given to emotion: and thither I went. Charlotte Ismay received me perfectly, showing no surprise and giving me a hot bath (which I greatly needed) and an excellent dinner. After it, I told her that, since my parents had not bothered to meet me, I should not go to Kineton and I should not see them again: I felt quite confident that I could make my own way in the world. I was not upset: I simply felt that my family no longer existed. Aunt Dot pooh-poohed this attitude and said that I was being melodramatic, and that my parents never had met anyone at stations, which was true. She picked up the telephone, rang them up, and told them that I should be down at such-and-such a time and they must meet me, or else . . .

I went down, and was met. Everyone was embarrassed. The house was a hospital, and twenty girls whom I had known in my teens sat round the dinner table, disguised in VAD uniforms. They seemed to me unattractive, clumsy, and dull. My father presented me with a cheque for £300, for my past twenty-first birthday, and said he would now give me an allowance of £300 a year. I had a gratuity, and quite a lot of back pay which I had not been able to spend in Palestine. It seemed to me that I was staggeringly rich. Since it was still supposed that, after ten days leave, I was going to France, I was able to persuade my stepmother to allow me to take my stepsister and her governess, Stella Phillips – the two people I really loved – to London. I took a suite at Claridge's, and asked everyone I knew to lunch, dinner, supper and the theatre. I made Atkinson come down from Durham. On his first day there, my stepmother also came to lunch: there were about ten of us. I noticed that Atkinson seemed strangely ill-at-ease, and that there was sweat on his forehead. I thought perhaps the room was too hot. After lunch my stepmother, as we sat on the sofa on the right of the entrance to the lounge (that moment is very clear), said: 'Did you know that your friend Atkinson was a trooper?' I said no, I hadn't known it, but in any case I had been a private. 'That's different,' said my stepmother. 'You make strange friends' The next day Atkinson told me that he must go. I was too much buried in enjoyment to care. He went. He wrote me a charming, heart-breaking letter saying that he had enjoyed our friendship, but that 'we moved in different circles'. Pest and fiend that I was, I did not bother to

answer. I never saw him again. In the whole of my life, I regret nothing so much.

One morning, while my sister was trying shoes at Pinet's shop in Bond Street, the maroons blared. Across this distance of time, I cannot imagine why we were not prepared for that moment: on tiptoe, so to speak, for it. But we were not. Scurrying out, we secured a taxi by great good luck, and, with a sort of conditioned reflex like that of everyone else, said: 'Buckingham Palace!' There followed an hour during which London was bewitched as never since, and, I should guess, never before. 1945 was a damp dull squib compared to it, and I doubt whether Mafeking night saw such a release from tension. By the time we reached Trafalgar Square (and I cannot think why we went that way: perhaps St James's Street was blocked) people were pouring out of the houses like ants, flushed, crying, laughing, shouting, throwing hats and shoes and scarves into the air, clambering on to every cab, every taxi, every bus, every delivery wagon, every bicycle. I see now, in front of us, a lorry filled with sacks, on to which a whole lot of girls had clambered, tears streaming down their cheeks, laughing and weeping. All traffic control was gone: the mass of vehicles, heavy with cheering people, moved up the Mall. Through the trees, below Carlton House Terrace, an officer perched on a milk waggon drove his horse at a gallop, the milk-pails rattling behind him. The war was over. And an epoch, though we did not realize it, was ended.

I was now a person very different from the young man who nervously slipped through the dock gates of Liverpool in 1915. Whether the change was good or bad, whether I was better or worse equipped for life, are questions answerable only if we lived our lives twice over. Undoubtedly I was more self-reliant, more decisive, and more adventurous, than I should have been had I spent those four years at Oxford. On the other hand I was more restless and more confused. Had I been at Oxford, I should perhaps have seen a straight dull road of life stretching ahead and taken it. Now I saw too many possible roads. Like all young people – or at any rate most – I was divided in mind between practical possibilities, vague desires, and conventional associations. I had been an undistinguished soldier and an undistinguished schoolboy, and I had (though this came later) few illusions about my talents. If I thought about the future, which I did not do very much, it was with a sense of alarm: I was trained for

nothing and I seemed to myself already old. I had a vague desire to live somewhere on the borderland of the arts, but since I had never met a single musician, painter, architect, journalist, writer, poet, actor, producer or publisher, I had no idea how such a borderland could be reached. I also had a vague desire to get away from people, and to live a life apart from cities, societies, and institutions. Again, I had no idea how such a thing could be accomplished. My conventional associations decreed that Work was a different thing from Pleasure – as it ought not to be. I was aware that my father might take a strong and unpleasant attitude if I did not follow approved lines, and the approved lines were few. The Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Foreign Office, the Civil Service – these would pass: to become a lawyer, a doctor, or an architect might have been just possible if (as I thought) I had been younger, but at twenty-two I was too old for long studies, and there was a host of much younger people coming up. I should, I felt, be instantly condemned – and deprived of money – if I attempted to become a painter or a writer or a musician: in any case I had small faith in my abilities. I can see now that I was timid and silly: but most young people are: and the early twenties of 1918, thrown back into the world with a half-completed education, were curiously unwanted by society. Older people shook their heads and thought that we had better stay in the Army: younger people were irritated by our tales of war, and wanted us out of the way. Except for those of undoubted talents and decisive aims, the situation was uncomfortable. Among a mass of confused feelings I had one sure wish – that I did not want to live in England. The spacious days of Nutfield still held my affection, and I did not doubt that the English should govern the world but the grey wet climate and the conventional masks held no charm for me.

I now entered upon a decade of glorious life. I was stiff in opinions, always in the wrong, everything by starts, and nothing long: I was unstable as water and I did not excel: nevertheless, I enjoyed life to the full. The way that I chose – or that circumstances chose for me – was disorderly, aimless, and often plain mad: but, as I now see, it was the pattern which fitted my character, and which, lamentably, through economic necessity and convention, I failed to maintain. My character was allergic to all respectability, routine and repetition: steady jobs, long service, 'loyalty' and patient effort seemed to me then, as they

seem to me now, denials of life. Man is born to skim every possible experience and enjoy them all: not to spend his whole waking hours – Good God! – in an office or a factory, with the carrot of an old-age pension dangling at the end of it. In this matter our age has made its most dreadful error, and that will be the verdict of posterity: and worst of all creeds is the famous communist delusion which seeks to dragoon men, like ants, into ‘usefulness’. A pox on usefulness! There they go, the useful scientists who help to destroy humanity, the useful politicians who muddle the world, the useful business men who pick pockets and create anxiety, the useful civil servants binding men with rules: there they go, tumbling into the dark, forgotten: and, as Matthew Arnold said, ‘unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest’. True, Matthew Arnold also had hard things to say about the wide ocean: but for me, at any rate, it seems preferable to be struck by the tempest than to live in a brazen prison. My trouble was that, instead of exposing myself to tempests, I was apt to run for shelter.

Demobilization in 1918 was a long and frustrating business. It was indeed such an infuriating process that in 1945 the War Office, under my friend Sir James Grigg, took efficient steps to see that it was not repeated. I was sent to Catterick Camp, a dreary place where for four useless months I carried out useless army duties – long fussy drills, spit and polish, ceremonial parades. I was bored (as most of us were) by this aimless prison life. In the evenings, for want of anything better to do, I went to the Officers’ Club and had dancing lessons. But I could not dance. I could learn steps, and dance by myself: I could not dance *with* someone. This was not due to anti-feminism: in later years at ‘queer’ parties I tried dancing with men, and that was worse: it was due to some strange lack of response to another human body. I am oddly and unreasonably revolted by physical intimacy. I am astonished by the desire of many human beings to share a bed with another, even for one night, or, God save us, sometimes for a whole lifetime: to me the idea seems repulsive. The Western idea of kissing is something that I could do without: and as for what the Americans have aptly termed ‘necking’, I find it a hideous bore. I fail to understand why human beings should feel compelled to stand or sit or lie, sucking at each other’s flesh. The good or wicked fairies at my birth left these pleasures out of my composition. When people pat me on the back or ruffle my hair, my immediate reaction is to strike them.

So, although I loved music and movement, I could not dance.

One day I happened to attend a lecture given by Alec Waugh. He extolled the delights of a university, and the value of them as a part of experience. I was carried away. For a shining moment the four-year-dead dazzlement of Oxford was revived. Impulsively I decided that I must go. And this decision was convenient, because demobilization was made easier for accepted students. But to arrive in Oxford was far less easy than I had imagined. In 1914 I had matriculated and been accepted by the House: but now the House would have nothing to do with me, at least for a couple of years: it was full of younger men, and also those from the Army who were more distinguished, or showed more promise, than I. I therefore had to accept Brasenose, and thereby, I suspect, cooked my goose. BNC was then a college curiously divorced from Oxford's intellectual life: it was the habitation of 'hearties', intent on sport and rowing; and I was a fish out of water. My splendid visions of warm friendships, enthralling studies, and brilliant honours rapidly dissolved. The ever-jangling bells and monastic atmosphere grated on my nerves. When Mr Stallybrass enquired what school I wished to take, I replied 'International Law'. He smiled benevolently and said that no such school existed. I said that it should exist: we had to learn to avoid war. He suggested that I take History, which 'would come to much the same thing'. It did not, although idiotically I agreed. I might have done well in English, and, since I was drifting towards the Foreign Office, modern languages were essential. I was a complete fool at History: those biased national accounts of events have never held my attention. For two terms I sported my oak, and waded through volumes which bored me: then I threw in my hand, and had a splendid time on the river. And I went to see Robert Vansittart at the Foreign Office. He was an old acquaintance, since he had been a friend of Lord Willoughby de Broke, who lived near Kington. I explained my dilemma to Vansittart, and asked him whether (since I was now more or less committed, by lack of other ideas, to the 10 examination) I should stay at Oxford for the three years necessary for a degree. He said that he thought that modern languages, learnt a'road, would be far more valuable. I therefore decided to go to France, Italy, and Germany.

My father was, perhaps not surprisingly, much angered by my behaviour. Not having been to a university himself, he thought that they were a waste of time. However, once I had decided he

expected me to stick to my decision, and the idea of 'abroad' was hateful to him. He began to embark on a kind of passive resistance which became a habit: it consisted in forgetting to pay me my quarterly £75, and thus making me write to ask for it, which, as he knew, I did with some distaste and guilt. Indeed I would spin out my money at the end of each quarter until I was stony broke. Later, when I began to earn money, he frequently forgot to pay it altogether: but by then it did not matter. In those early years I could not do without it, because I was superbly unfitted to earn money at anything. And I developed an angry resentment at being dependent, which stayed with me even when, in my fifties, I inherited an unearned income. I am all in favour of unearned incomes for all, but I cannot escape a feeling that such money is not quite real and may disappear. Which of course is possible.

I did not know quite how to go about learning French in France. It was easier planned than done. I asked Vansittart and others of his circle, but the war had created a gap in the tradition of French cramming-houses, and I got no further. I went to Paris and stayed in a series of (necessarily) cheap *pensions*, and took lessons from a charming lady of the Comédie Française who made me stand up and declaim Racine and Molière. It was a moment of acute Anglo-French tension, and the French were full of the idea that we had fought to the last Frenchman, did not care that France was devastated, and were letting them down. The people in my *pensions* carefully shook hands with me at every breakfast, and never ceased being rude about England and the English. I began to feel enveloped in a fog of hatred. A detestation of Paris was born in me, and flourished: even to-day, I cannot go there without feeling stifled. It is the only city which I have steadily disliked. And I felt at odds with the French. Later experience taught me to modify that view: but that couple of months in Paris bred in me an unreasonable kind of idea that Edward VII had been very much mistaken, and that our proper allies were the Germans. And so I think they are: it is, paradoxically, the closeness of our views which makes us jealous of them. England is never really allied with a Latin country.

Presently I heard of a place in Blois. Madame la Marquise de Montarby had, it seemed, accepted pupils before the war and been very successful with them. It sounded grand: I took off for Blois. Nothing could have been worse. The very doubtful 'Mar-

quise' was a yellow old dame dying of cancer in a very small flat: her daughter, poor, sad, sacrificing Marie-Louise, was to take over the teaching, which she was quite incapable of doing. They were desperately poor, and I was the only pupil who had come their way since the war. Marie-Louise and I sat on the floor in the old dame's bedroom, while she read the Lives of the Saints, and occasionally, in a hoarse voice, uttered some comment such as: '*Sa langue était noire! Est-ce que ma langue est noire?*' – putting it out. The position was horrid. I knew that they needed my money, I knew that I was wasting time, and I had not enough money to make another move. I bicycled around the countryside, trying to discover other possibilities. One day I found myself at a gate in a long white wall outside St Avertin. I glimpsed what seemed an attractive house and a large garden. There was a barking of many dogs. The gate was opened by a tall, gangling, completely bald man, who regarded me with disfavour. '*Aucune place ici!*' I asked if I might come in. With a bad grace he allowed it. There was indeed a charming garden, dipping down into a valley and up a hill beyond. There were several beautiful Alsatian dogs. We sat in a cool hall, and presently some white-and-gold doors were opened, and Carola de Ritter came in. At that moment a bell should have rung in my head. She was a beautiful woman, with deep blue eyes and a strange scar which somehow increased her attraction. She was decisive to the point of rudeness, but there was something dramatic about her. Abruptly she told me that she was full up and could take no more pupils. I said that I was sorry, stood up, and left.

I went back to Blois with my mind made up. I felt sure that Madame de Ritter was the right teacher for me. I sat down and wrote her what must have been a very naïve letter, in which I said that I had liked her dogs and her garden, and that, when she had a vacancy, I should like to come. She wrote back saying that my letter had amused her, that she was glad that the dogs and the garden had passed muster, and that I could come at once if I was *un jeune homme sérieux*. She added that she had no use for pupils who were not *sérieux*. I packed my bags and went.

There were four other young Englishmen in the house. Madame de Ritter was a teacher of whirlwind rapidity, quick impatience, and – if you met her half-way – glowing enthusiasm. The gifted teacher is very rare, and I was fortunate. From 7 to 12 a.m., she took each of us for an hour. During that hour, one

was expected to have learnt twenty of the idiomatic phrases - *A qui le dites-vous? Don't I know it?* - of which she had accumulated many hundreds: to read an essay in French which she had set the day before: and to recite by heart 'a passage from a French author, dramatist, or poet. Each of us came out from that hour with perspiration beading our brows: but also with increased knowledge. In the afternoons the young gentlemen went off to Tours to amuse themselves, or to play golf: but I could neither afford, nor did I want, such distractions. On my first afternoon I rang the bell for tea. The *bonne* who answered said that Madame did not give *le gouter*. I leaned out of the window and saw Madame de Ritter sitting in the garden, reading. I said: 'I want tea.' Without looking up, she replied, 'Go and get it in Tours, like the others: I don't provide it.' I said, 'On the contrary, I want to stay here and work: and I want tea.' She looked up laughing and said, '*Foutez-moi le camp.*' I said, 'No, I won't.' 'Very well,' she said, 'come down and have tea with me.' I went down, and, as I sat under the trees with her, she suddenly became warm and charming. She told me something about her life, that she had studied at Oxford and the Sorbonne, and was a friend of Rénan, with whom she greatly wished to go and work. She asked me about my past and my plans. '*Si vous êtes vraiment sérieux,*' she said, 'I think that I might help you not only in French - that is easy - but also in other subjects. I know these Foreign Office examinations.' I said that I was *très sérieux*. Her blue eyes sparkled, and her cheeks were flushed. She had fallen in love with me. That fortunate event probably enabled me to pass the Foreign Office Examination.

But, as always, I could not stick to anything for long. One day, at a tennis party, I was introduced to a distinguished French General called de Bonneval. He was an enchanting old gentleman and I got on very well with him. He told me that his great ambition was to learn English. I said, meaning nothing, 'I should be delighted to teach you.' The next day I received a letter in his spidery handwriting. He told me that he was Governor of Constantine in Algeria, and that if I would care to go and stay with him *au pair* and teach him English, he was sure that his three daughters would increase my knowledge of French. The invitation seemed to me exotic and enchanting: I accepted immediately. I had reckoned without Madame de Ritter. Her fury was blistering. '*Tu n'es pas sérieux!*' She wept; she was distraught. So was I: but I was determined to go. (God knows I

have been punished in later life for my callousness towards the few people who loved me.) I sailed for Algiers. It was a terribly rough crossing: the three men in my cabin were laid out, retching and green in the face. I stayed on deck for the thirty-six hours, thinking that if the boat rolled over I would rather be drowned than caught inside. Fear has always conquered seasickness for me.

Constantine was, I thought, a dream of beauty. It is one of the most dramatic cities of the world. Round three-quarters of it the river rushes in a chasm so deep as to be reminiscent of Kubla Khan. The General lived in a Moorish palace with innumerable courtyards, and I had a suite of dazzling rooms. The de Bonneval family were enchanting, and called me 'Monsieur Pagaie' because I was, as they thought, so untidy. I did my best to teach the General English, but it was not easy. He had studied it with dictionaries, which had told him that 'come' should be pronounced 'keum', and so on and so forth. I could not cure him of these addictions. But his kindness to me was immense. He took me on all his rounds, and treated me as an honoured guest. I came to know quite a lot about Algeria and French colonialism. The great aim of the General was to make me sick. When he took me to lunch with sheikhs, and they handed me, from the couscous, a wet and slippery sheep's eye, he would chuckle, '*Vous aurez mal au coeur!*' I was determined that I wouldn't, and swallowed the sheep's eye as an oyster. He took me to see the Aïssoua, who mutilated themselves every Friday, and when a man stuck a dagger through his belly or thrust his head into flames - '*Vous aurez mal au coeur!*' I didn't. I laughed a great deal and enjoyed myself immensely. But I had yet to learn Italian and it was time for me to leave. I took myself, as a parting gesture, to Biskra, which I had not seen. On the way I read Robert Hichens' *Garden of Allah*, and was caught up in a wave of sentimentality. Biskra seemed incredibly romantic. But all the hotels - it was out of season - were shut, and it was not comfortable. I went to the 'Garden', and asked Smaïn, the gate-keeper, whether I could have my fortune told, as it is told in the *Garden of Allah*. He summoned the fortune-teller, and under the twisted trees on the edge of the desert, he ran the sand through his fingers and spoke of my life. I am no believer in fortune-tellers, but I very nearly believed him. He described my family with uncanny accuracy, said that I was bemused by foreign countries but that my life lay in my own, that I should shortly get a 'brown letter' to recall me (and on my return to Constan-

tine, I got, anticlimatically, a telegram asking me to be best man at a friend's wedding), and that 'what I wanted' were 'bits of paper' which I should get through a relative with a mark like this – he drew it on the sand – on the calf of the left leg. When I described this later, my stepmother cried, 'But I *have* a mark like that!' And so she had. But I don't think I ever got bits of paper or anything else from her.

Suddenly, Isadora Duncan descended on Biskra. The Royal Hotel was opened for her, and I gratefully moved in. Isadora had a pianist in tow called Walter Rummel, whom she spoke of as 'The Archangel Gabriel! Isn't he beautiful?' She included me in her slapdash emotions – we were the only three guests in the hotel – and I was spellbound by her extraordinary personality and beauty. She was one of the strangest human beings I ever knew. You could not say that she had any exceptional talent, or even that she was strikingly intelligent: but she radiated such colossal animal magnetism, combined with an utter disregard of all conventions, that she seemed apart from the human race. I met her again some four years later on the Riviera, just before she died, and, although she had grown fat, she still seemed to possess the same magical attraction.

Italian arrangements were as vague and unsatisfactory as those of France had been. I went to board with a Professor Jalla in Florence. He was an old man with a long white beard, and not quite right in the head. His wife was Swiss, angular, fussy, and nervous. They lived in a small and ugly flat outside the Porta Romana, and apparently knew few people. It was not a promising set-up. Presently the old man developed anthrax, and his wife in tears told me that I must go. I moved to a *pensione* which was not much better. I found Florence enchanting but was stuck in a horrid isolation. One day some English acquaintances, whom I met in an hotel, introduced me to an old Marchese and his nephew, Sandro. Sandro was about my age and we took to one another. I was not (thank God) in love with him, nor he with me: but we were, so to speak, on the same wave-length of ideas, amused and attracted by the same things, and between us was the bond of constant laughter. He became perhaps the best friend I ever made, as snug and comfortable as an old coat. He was a painter, and had a large studio flat in a tower in the via dei Bardi which belonged to his uncle. He invited me to move in, and I did. Not only the learning of Italian, but also life in general, became much easier: Sandro knew a host of people, and

also, since he was poor, how to live cheaply. And in those days life in Italy could be dirt cheap. Sandro was, I think, an exceptionally gifted painter, and, like the painters of the Renaissance, did a bit of everything. He was an expert painter, etcher and lithographer: he amused himself by cleaning or faking-up old pictures and furniture which he found in the markets: and he designed for a firm of jewellers. He laughed a great deal over my intention to go into the Foreign Office, and asked me why I had chosen such a dreary career. Faced with his activities, I began to wonder myself: there seemed to be many more interesting things to do. My resolution became so shaky that I took myself off to Rome: after all, to become a painter and be cut off with a shilling wasn't on my list of possibilities, and it was high time I passed some sort of examination. Shutting myself in a small room in the via Gregoriana, I plunged through Dante, Carducci, Leopardi, and *I Promessi Sposi*, and went out for lessons in Italian and also German, of which I hoped to acquire a sufficient smattering to take it as a third language.

I had now spent nearly a year in France and Italy, and it was time to present myself at Burlington House. I paid a flying visit to Naples, which enchanted me: indeed I was in love with Italy, and made a vow, which I have kept, that some day I would live there.

Examinations are an unsatisfactory method of testing human ability. At that conclusion everyone of sensibility, who has been both examiner and examinee, must surely arrive. The young man or girl who is nervous – and who of intelligence is not? – when confronted by a paper or a row of faces, a time-limit and questions which may decide a whole future, may often present a caricature of himself or herself. An examinee, unless of blunted feelings, can never be normal during an examination. An effort is being made which alters character. True it is that facts, dates, sums and arguments can be remembered and written down or even spoken, but it is only memory, not character, that is under examination. An assessment of character is not made, any more than a friend is made, in a few moments or hours. True again, there will be records of character to consult, reports and references to be read: but in most cases they will be prejudiced half-truths – prejudiced, that is to say, by a desire to help or a dislike of condemnation or even plain likes or dislikes. On the other side of the table the examiner, perhaps well-intentioned (but, if

the appointment does not concern him personally, likely to be indifferent) fits the puzzle together as best he can, and judges the examinee. He cannot, however, say with any certainty, 'This individual will *not*, within the next month, become a dipsomaniac, murder his mother, burgle a bank, or turn into a lunatic.' Nor can he say, 'This individual will be Prime Minister, or the Head of Scotland Yard, or the Governor of Canada, or the Managing Director of Harridge's.' All that he can say is that the individual has or has not a good memory, and seems in his or her first twenty years to have followed a safe conventional pattern. Delude yourself as you will, this is not a recipe for finding great human beings. And, if you take men who have risen to the top of the human scum and made history, you will scarcely find a single one who has excelled in examinations. The human brain has not devised a substitute for examinations, but it is debatable whether their futility is not the root of all our troubles. Men in authority, in any field, should be, paradoxically, men without ambition.

The approach to Burlington House was frightening. A whole life depended, or seemed to depend, on a week's examinations. I was appalled by the discovery that there were three hundred and eighty candidates. I was even more appalled by their appearance. They all seemed smarter, quicker, more intelligent and more studious than I could ever hope to be. When the first paper was placed before me, I could not even read it. The hall, with all the assembled and busily-writing candidates, swam before me. Absurd as it may seem, I was at the point of fainting. For some twenty minutes I was stuck in this self-inflicted hell: then I answered the questions in a great hurry, with my brain functioning at about twenty per cent of normal. (Do you think that I am going to tell you that I failed in these examinations? Not at all. If you think that, you have misunderstood my arguments.) At lunch-time Sir Adrian Baillie, who was one of the candidates and had been with me for a short time *chez* Madame de Ritter slapped me on the back and said: 'You're looking peaky! I shall take you to Buck's.' He gave me oysters (the first time I had ever swallowed them) and black velvet. I was fortified not only by these, but also, and more effectively, by a notion that Adrian was a complete ass (I knew that his French was lousy) and that I could at least do better than he. In this idea I was quite mistaken.

The examinations concluded, a nerve-twanging period of waiting followed. Then the printed results were circulated. In those

days (I do not know what the practice is now) marks were awarded not by numerical figures but by signs – Alpha plus, Alpha minus, Beta plus, Beta minus, Gamma plus, Gamma minus, and so on – under each subject. I presume that this is or was a dodge (and perhaps a wise one) of examiners to avoid claims which concerned only high marks. The Alphas and Betas could always be interpreted in different ways: for instance, that the English paper represented only fifty, the Italian seventy, the French a hundred, and so on. The total could be juggled. However, the hieroglyphs had to mean *something*. Adding them up in various ways, I concluded that I must be, on any count, among the first six. I had of course passed: that is to say I was above the line of those who had failed. I was thus a candidate for the Selection Board, which was held after the examinations. This was quite fair: the Selection Board did not have to concern themselves with a mass of unknown candidates, but only with those who had passed a certain standard of intelligence. As far as I remember, there were about thirty of us.

When the high white-and-gold double doors were opened in front of me, and I walked unsteadily up an enormous room towards a table at which twelve elderly gentlemen were sitting, staring at me, I was, as you may or may not imagine, paralysed by fright. The Chairman asked me to be seated, and I nearly missed the chair. He said:

‘Colonel Phillips, I think you might begin.’

There was a pause, during which Colonel Phillips riffled through the papers in front of him, and my nerves rose to concert pitch. Then the Colonel said:

‘I see, Mr Fielden, that at the beginning of the war you joined up as a *private*. Now why did you do that, when you knew that England was calling for officers?’

The question was entirely unexpected. My mind fizzled. Had my uncle told Colonel Phillips that I had refused a commission in the Guards? I said haltingly:

‘I thought what I ought to learn the job.’

Colonel Phillips said suavely:

‘Did you think that officers were not trained?’

I mumbled: ‘I don’t know.’ Colonel Phillips rolled his eyes towards the Chairman. They said plainly: that is enough. My spirits sank to zero. The Chairman said: ‘Air Marshal?’ The Air Marshal, friendly, leaned towards me:

‘It seems that in Palestine you volunteered to be an air obser-

ver, and did a course. And then you left it. How was that?’

All my weak points, I thought. I can hardly say that I was in a funk.

‘I wasn’t very good at it –’ I started. The Air Marshall cut in, and said that the reports on me seemed to be excellent. ‘But I couldn’t,’ I said, ‘see enemy planes quickly enough, and I wasn’t good at ground spotting.’ ‘Tell me,’ said Air Marshal, ‘were you frightened?’ ‘Well, yes, I think I was,’ I replied. There was a little laughter. A wave of anger went through me. The Chairman said: ‘Mr Reaper?’

‘Now,’ said Mr Reaper in a hearty voice, looking down at his dossier through gold-rimmed spectacles, ‘you went up to Oxford. It seems that you attended very few lectures indeed. Is that so?’

‘I found them very dull. I thought that it was easier and quicker to pick up knowledge from books.’

‘But the books bored you too, since you didn’t stay long enough to take a degree?’

‘I thought perhaps I ought to learn languages.’

‘But you could have done that in the vacations, and at Oxford too?’

‘I suppose so.’

Floored.

The Chairman said: ‘Sir John?’ Sir John, very handsome and dignified, said:

‘Now. I shall ask you an important question. You have spent some considerable time in Palestine. What do you think of the Balfour Declaration?’

All right. To hell with them.

‘I think,’ I said, ‘that it’s the most degrading document ever signed. England has sold itself to the Jews, and Palestine belongs to the Arabs. And that is what everyone in the Army thinks.’

The Chairman said: ‘Thank you, Mr Fielden.’

I staggered out, down the long red carpet.

It was no particular surprise to receive, a week later, a polite letter to say that the Foreign Office would not be requiring my services. Adrian Baillie, however, had been given one of the eight vacant posts. I was angry. My work had been utterly wasted. The passing of the Foreign Office examination did not, so far as I could see, help me to any other work. I went to see Vansittart. He said yes, he thought perhaps I had been shabbily treated: he would see what he could do. A few days later I got a letter to say that the Foreign Office would be glad to take me as Hono-

rary Attaché at Washington or Budapest. Vansittart added a note saying that, if I were patient, I should get into the service later. The prospect did not please me – I was not rich enough to be an Honorary Attaché – but it was Hobson's choice. Then as now, I had no desire to go to America, but Budapest seemed fairly promising. I went to see Sir Thomas Hohler, our Minister there, and at that time on leave in London. He was affable, and appeared delighted to have me. He told me to buy a fur coat. At lunch at my club, skimming the papers, I saw an advertisement for an examination for the League of Nations Secretariat. I had only vague notions about the League, and none about the Secretariat. However, I went round and put down my name. The examination took place almost immediately. Compared with that of the Foreign Office, it was simple. For the simple and yet fundamental reason that I did not care and was not nervous, I made no mistakes and came out by a long way top of the list. A week later I received a telegram from Geneva, asking if I would go there at once at a salary of four pounds a day. I had no doubt that there had been a mistake in transmission and that four pounds a week had been intended – just about what I should have got in the Foreign Office. I was quite content with that. I wired that I was coming, said a polite goodbye to Sir Thomas Hohler (and the Foreign Office), and departed for Geneva. Arrived there, I found that I was actually to be paid four pounds a day. It seemed a staggering sum. And in those days it was. I had suddenly blossomed into affluence. A glance at a newspaper had altered my life.

Geneva seemed beautiful. I had not become allergic to that shattering destroyer of beauty, the picture postcard. Morning by morning, the blue lake and snowy mountains thrilled me. The spacious Palais des Nations was filled with enchanting people, and I was happy as a lark. The League was indeed staffed at that time – as pioneering organisations of that land always and melancholically are – with idealists who believed sincerely that wars could be stopped. The work – after a week of two of agony – was not difficult, though it was arduous enough. The League, having started from scratch, had to build up an enormous array of files very quickly. Treaties, reports, the agenda of conferences and the proceedings of parliaments, had to be translated not only with rapidity but with accuracy. For this it was necessary to dictate translations very quickly. I had never dictated before, and I did not find it easy. My secretary, Judy Jackson, a darling

person who later became secretary to Mrs Stanley Baldwin, tapped her shoe against the table-leg when I paused. I was infuriated, and drove my mind faster and faster. Thanks to Judy, I soon became expert at the job. Today I am horrified to think how that expertise has vanished.

My situation was now perfect. Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretary-General of the League, and his charming family, were very kind to me, and I spent many happy hours at their house. I was devoted to 'Tiger' Howard, that strange and unusual woman who was the *Eminence Grise* – or perhaps *Rose* – of the League. At week-ends we made up parties and went to Chambéry or Aix or Gstaad. There seemed to be no reason why I should not stay in the League Secretariat for ever, earning a larger and larger salary, and falling back in old age on a comfortable pension.

There was a reason, however, and it lay in my own character. I soon found Geneva not only boring but asphyxiating. The mountains stepped closer: the lake was shrouded in mist. I was fortunate in meeting the many celebrities who came to Geneva, and for Fridtjof Nansen I developed a hero-worship: but it was not enough. Geneva-for-life, however well-paid, was not my aim. The Genoa Conference of 1922 was just rising on the horizon, and I made it my business to go around saying that I was the only person in the League Secretariat who spoke fluent Italian. Nothing succeeds better than blowing your own trumpet, and I was successful. Six of us were sent to Genoa to help the Italian authorities. We were a harmonious and happy sextet. My salary was raised to five pounds a day.

At Genoa we discovered that the Italian authorities, though willing to spend any amount of money, had no idea about conferences. They had provided the sumptuous Royal Palace, with its private railway station below, and a blotting-pad and silver paper knife for every delegate: and that was all. We were by that time used to the procedure and requirements of conferences, and we went to work on roneos, typewriters, paper, clips, telephones, notice-boards, interpreters, and even hotel accommodation. For a week we worked extremely hard: we hardly slept: and I remember that the palms of our hands were bruised black and blue by roneo machines and rubber stamps. Then we relaxed: and for six weeks did almost nothing at all. Occasionally we were called in to translate or interpret, but on the whole we were magnificently lazy. And five pounds a day was a fortune in Genoa.

The Genoa Conference is long forgotten: but at that time it was a glittering excitement – the equivalent, and perhaps more, of a Summit Conference now. Thirty-four Prime Ministers attended it, an event which had never happened before: and Lloyd George (though a younger generation may not believe it) was then a more dazzling figure than Churchill ever became. On the top of all that, the Bolshevik leaders were to attend! Genoa seemed the hub of the world. If you could wear in your button-hole the Conference insignia, you were *persona grata* everywhere. Trains from the royal station ran every hour to east and west of the Riviera: they were composed of Pullman carriages with deep armchairs: there was no payment: one could go (and we went) to San Remo or Rapallo for dinner or for the night. Splendid meaningless speeches were made by day: I can still see Lloyd George, swinging his pince-nez on a black ribbon, saying ‘The thrill of peace has run through the veins of Europe!’ And there was an unforgettable moment when, in absolute silence, the Russian delegates, headed by Tchicherin and Krassin, who had been brought down to the conference hall in a specially guarded train, walked to their seats. Everyone expected a bomb. (The bomb, however, took a different form in the Rapallo treaty.)

To my immense astonishment, the Italian Government now asked me if I would care to go to Rome to supervise the records of the conference. They would pay me five pounds a day, and it would last, they thought, about a year. It was a splendid invitation. I wrote to Sir Eric Drummond, asking if I could accept it. He replied that I could not. ‘You are,’ he added, ‘constantly running away: you must learn discipline.’ A fig for discipline, I thought: and I replied that I was going to Rome and the League could do without me. I burned my boats. The Italian Government said that they would not need me for a month, so I joined Sandro at Capri. There I swam and paddled canoes: and was spellbound by the red cliffs and the blue water. One day I received a letter from the Dutch Government, saying that they would pay me seven pounds a day if I would take a staff of translators and interpreters to the forthcoming economic conference at the Hague. I was now drunk with the possibilities of international conferences (and indeed they are still moneymakers today, if you are on the bandwagon). I threw over the Italian Government, and travelled from Capri to the Hague – a quite long train journey then. The Hague was enchanting, and the Dutch gave us a splendid time: I travelled over Holland and

loved its fleecy clouds and flat views: but the conference was a flop. Litvinov and the other Russian delegates simply did not turn up at committee meetings: they went and learned to bicycle on the sands of Scheveningen. Soon it was over. 'I had bankrupted myself. I was unemployed.

The landscape, so far, has had few figures. That was inevitable. For six years I had not, with the brief exception of Oxford, ever spent three months in the same place or with the same people. Life had flittered past me like a row of lights seen from a train. And my compartment had been empty. In Geneva for the first time I had a small flat of my own, and took my place in what appeared to be a permanent social group. Apart from Sir Eric and Lady Drummond, their daughter Margaret, and Tiger Howard, there were R. H. Wilenski and his wife, for whom I soon felt a warm friendship: and they, though it did not seem so at the time, pushed me towards a greater knowledge of the arts, and the development of what talent I possessed as a painter. There was Hilary St George Saunders, who with the studious John Palmer wrote detective stories, and later made a name for himself by writing *The Battle of Britain*, and other such accounts, for the Government. There was Helen Foley the poet, whom Hilary later married. Geoffrey Dennis, then struggling with his first book, *Mary Lee*, was the intelligent head of our department, and working with him was the lively red-head Sheikh Hall, whom he was to marry. There was Dame Rachel Crowdy, beloved by all, Chester Purves, a gentle creature whose heart was much in the League, and William Moloney, a genial madman whose heart was everywhere. There was the tall, handsome, commanding woman known as Dr Dixon, who, until you knew her, seemed like an incarnation of Hedda Gabler: and her friend Marjory Lockett, with the kindest and warmest heart in the world, whose friendship was to go with me through life. Best of all my friends perhaps was Mrs Lilian Adam, a gifted member of the Baring family, who came out to work with us in spells, and was the life and soul of every party. There were, too, the visiting firemen, chief among them perhaps Philip Noel-Baker, whom I came to know well. Philip at that time walked in a cloud of glory, both as a very distinguished athlete and also as an architect of the League. He was to influence my future considerably. Just about this time I also came to know Gerald Heard and Christopher Wood. Christopher – not the painter – was a temperamen-

tal young man of great wealth, and a concert pianist. Gerald was a phenomenon. He had a brain like an encyclopaedia, a rapid wit, and an enterely original view of life. For some fifteen years he and Christopher became a part of my life. When, in 1937, they decided, with Auden, Isherwood and Aldous Huxley to decamp to America, I mourned their loss, and thought, as I still think, that their decision was fatally wrong.

I proceeded now, as young men should, to fall in love. Or didn't I? I thought that Ann was very beautiful, I loved being in her company, and was convinced that to pass my life with her would be heaven. But I did not alas, wish to kiss her, fondle her, or go to bed with her. I was not at the time quite aware of these ambivalent sentiments, because I was astonishingly ignorant. I had an idea that there was some deep division between sacred and profane love: as indeed there may be. At first it seemed to me that I could marry Ann, even if lust did not enter into the bargain: then I began to have doubts. Suddenly and for the first time this 'love' made me aware that, although I enjoyed the company of women and wished to be married, my physical desires flowed towards my own sex, and refused to flow towards the opposite one. And let me add here that, if such was my natural bent, born with me and inescapable, I myself certainly did not bend it or like it that way: it was a crippling deformity. Up to that time, I had never had a love affair with one of my own sex, and the idea of such a thing violently repelled, while also violently attracting, me. I suddenly saw that if Ann agreed to marry me, as I was fairly sure she would, I might do her a great harm. I resolved that this problem must be fought out: so I went to Zurich to see Jung, and his assistant, Oscar Pfister. I told them my tale, and they were charming and sympathetic. I said that I wished to get married, and to change the course of my physical desires. After several visits and a good deal of correspondence, they told me that they feared they could do nothing for me, unless I cared to be a guinea-pig for a delicate surgical operation (I think it had to do with glands and hormones), which might or might not be successful. This I funkcd. Soon afterwards I went with a party, which included Ann, for a ten day holiday in Venice. I had never seen Venice before, and it is a romantic place. My love flowered. The others left us much alone, and we drifted here and there in gondolas. I could not bring myself to a decision. Would Ann, once married to me, suffer from my sexual indifference? Should I, married to Ann, be miraculously cured of

my homosexuality? I did not know. On the last afternoon of her visit I had planned to stay for a few days longer – we sat on the wall of the Arsenal Gardens, looking over the lagoons. I decided that I would risk all, and ask the overwhelming question. At that moment Ann, who had stretched herself out in the sun on the wall, said: ‘You know, what I most want is to have a dozen children.’ Suddenly I saw it all: not only my own impotence, but a string of nappies across the years. The words which had risen to my lips remained unspoken.

The next morning I ran beside her departing train, and my heart shouted that I could not lose her. But I did. I shall never be sure whether that decision was right or wrong. I believe that it was right. Those whom Nature has condemned to be homosexual should not drag members of the opposite sex into their lives. At the time, I was plunged in grief. Venice became a melancholy place.

From the Hague, in a panic, I wrote to Sir Eric Drummond, asking if I could return to the League. He replied gaily that I could not do so in a permanent capacity: I was much too unreliable. But he added that he would be glad to have me on a temporary basis for the Assembly, which was due to begin in a month’s time. When I arrived in Geneva, I found that Sir Eric had been indulging in a mild leg-pull at my expense. I could, if I wished, again become a permanent member of the Secretariat. But my wish was very feeble. Certainly the League offered security, travel, fairly easy work, pleasant surroundings, charming people – what more could one ask? I did ask more. What, I did not know: but not Geneva for life. That Assembly of 1922 was an awkward meeting: futile in the same way that, in a later era, meetings at Lake Success were futile under Russian vetoes. The Greeks, backed by Lloyd George, had embarked on a war which – so the English hoped – would take them to Constantinople and blot out the new nuisance, Mustapha Kemal. The French, on the contrary, thought that Kemal was the cat’s whiskers. It was the old familiar story: two great powers at loggerheads, and all the rest trying to climb on one bandwagon or the other. The Greek armies were falling back in disorder, and a disaster was imminent. At public sessions the growing rout in Anatolia was avoided with the beautiful delicacy which does not recognize sodomy or masturbation. It was an altogether disgusting performance by thirty-six nations. Eloquent speeches were

made about fishing rights, opium, river pollution, plumbing in Africa, the diseases of parrots, and other items of international significance. Never a word about Anatolia. Dear me no. Veils of hypocrisy and self-interest were daily drawn over the shocking picture.

The only delegate to grasp these veils and rend them at least temporarily was Nansen. Towards the end of the session he strode on to the dais, in spite of many efforts to restrain him, and delivered one of the most fiery and heart-warming speeches I have ever listened to. He trounced the assembled delegates for their cowardice and callousness. He pointed out, in his oddly attractive Norwegian English, that the object of the League was to avoid war, and that for a whole session a brutal war flaming on the threshold of Europe had been ignored. He said that he could only offer to go himself and instantly to the Near East, and do what might be possible for the million-and-a-half refugees who were being driven from the burning city of Smyrna. He hoped that in this work of mercy the League would support him. With a poor grace, and the staggeringly small sum of £32,000 from the assembled nations of the world, it did.

I was fired by Nansen's speech. Here at last, it seemed, was a thing to do and a man to follow. When I was given the opportunity to go with him, I leapt at it. Said Philip Baker, who was also going: 'We can't pay anything but expenses, you know: well, you can see that we can't.' I did see, and it did not seem to matter: I had, in spite of myself, saved some money from my salary, and it seemed enough. I did not quite tumble to the fact that other people would necessarily be paid, and that the unpaid worker is always suspect to the paid one. I was in a state of exaltation – a crusader who did not realize how futile crusades usually are. But Nansen had cast his spell over me, and it was a very potent spell.

During my life I have been privileged, as a flunkey, to meet a very large number of the celebrities of the world. No man or woman has ever given me quite the sense of human nobility and dignity which Nansen in his every action conveyed. And, mind you, Nansen had his faults and plenty of them. I was not hero-worshipping. Sometimes, in the days that followed, I could be hurt by what seemed his failures. Sometimes he appeared to make no sense at all. Quite often he acted rashly. It did not matter. Always one had the impression of a steadfast soul, incapable of a mean or trivial thought, incapable of selfishness or self-interest,

incapable of the smallest cruelty, of a flicker of dishonesty, of discouragement, pessimism, harsh judgement or, and above all, arrogance. Such qualities may not add up to success, but they are a bright flame in the world of men. It seems to me sad that Nansen is now fading into the mists of history, and that no book so far written about him conveys the greatness of the man. There is now only one man alive, Philip Noel-Baker, who is in a position to write the epic which Nansen deserves.

Nansen was born in Norway in 1861. His boyhood was spent on a farm. The long hard winters accustomed him to snow and ice, skis and skates, and also, perhaps, to solitude. His interest fastened on physics, mathematics, geology, zoology, astronomy, and – an obvious product – philosophy. When he was twenty-one he, as he afterwards said, ‘burned his boats’ and sailed in the *Viking* to the Arctic. By 1882 he was Keeper of Zoology at Bergen, and in the following year he was studying the colouring of nerve-threads under Golgi in Padua. In 1888 he sailed in the *Jason* to Greenland and crossed it. At twenty-eight he was already famous. He became Professor in the University of Christiania, and went to lecture in England. In 1893 he took the famous *Fram* to the North Pole. From then on he was engaged in Polar exploration, but in 1905 the dissolution of Norway’s union with Sweden drove him into politics, and he became the first Norwegian Ambassador in London. But his scientific interests did not slacken, and in 1911 he was studying a new trade route to northern Siberia, and went to Russia, where he was received with great enthusiasm. 1917 saw him in Washington, pleading for wheat for Norway: it was a natural step to the beginning of his great work of relief, starting with his work in Russia in 1921, and ending only with his death. The Nansen passport for refugees – the result of his personal intervention with each Government to get a number accepted – gave not only a place in the world, but new hope in life, to lost thousands.

The most striking facet of his personality was, to me, stillness. It was not an unfriendly or repellent stillness: it was the stillness of a deep pool. The pool could be ruffled by a summer breeze or agitated by a winter gale: Nansen’s laughter was frequent and infectious, and his rages titanic; but his soul remained calm. He never put on airs: he was his natural self with anyone and everyone: he loved dancing and food and the ladies: and he loathed all cities. He was, perhaps, a mass of contradictions, and often a source of irritation to men who considered themselves practical.

Yet with him one felt curiously safe, as if caught up in a warm ascending air of kindness, toleration, and understanding. Moreover one was spurred to effort, because one could not disappoint him. His was a personality before which the human spirit might well do homage. Certainly I had never met his like before, and never shall do so again. He became, most uncomfortably, the yardstick of my judgement of all those who are set in authority.

Nansen now instructed me to take the Simplon Orient Express from Lausanne on the following day, and to wait for him in Belgrade, where we would arrive twenty-four hours later. Judy Jackson, who was to go as Secretary, would accompany me. We were told what to do in Belgrade to prepare for Nansen's visit there. It must here be explained that Nansen, though he had now become Commissioner for Refugees in the Levant, was still in the full flood of his negotiations concerning Russian refugees, and his arrival in any capital city was a signal for thousands of them to rush to him, demanding employment or housing or passports or food. It was also a signal for the Government authorities to prepare themselves for the demands Nansen would make, and to be ready with all sorts of complaints about the behaviour of the refugees, and the inability of the country in question to receive any more. These matters quickly added up to a formidable total of work. Judy and I were to prepare the necessary appointments for the twenty-four hours Nansen would spend in Belgrade.

We drove along the lakeside in the early morning, arrived at Lausanne, and found that the Simplon Orient Express had left an hour before. It was October, and we had failed to note an hour's alteration in the timetable. The station authorities assured us that there was no other train for Belgrade until the next morning. We were desperate. Judy was as zealous about the job as I was, and it seemed unthinkable that thus, at the very first stage, we should let Nansen down by sheer carelessness. It was also unthinkable to return to Geneva, and unthinkable to wait like two fools for the train which would bring Nansen. We decided that the only thing was to go towards Belgrade as best we could. We took a train to Milan, changed there, changed at Venice, changed at Trieste, and at Zagreb had so long to wait that we went for a walk. Zagreb in those days seldom saw a foreigner, and we were followed by a policeman and presently arrested as suspicious characters (spies, I suppose) and led to a police station. There we complacently exhibited our diplomatic

passports, and were bowed out with apologies. Altogether it proved an amusing journey, and we arrived only two hours after the Simplon Orient Express in Belgrade. De luxe trains are not necessarily very fast ones.

In Belgrade it was raining heavily, and that city was then a fairly squalid and shabby place, remarkable only for acres of cobbles and particularly sticky mud. I did not care for it at all, and was bewildered by the Russian refugee chorés. A little gilt fell off my crusader's gingerbread that day: but Nansen's arrival restored it. Constantinople, which I had missed once, glittered again on the horizon. But as soon as we were on the train, Nansen called me into his carriage, and said that he wished me to leave the train at Nish the next morning, and go down, alone, to Greece. He would, he said, write me a letter saying that I was his representative in Greece and the Levant, and asking all authorities to help me. I was flabbergasted. I could not imagine what I could possibly do in Greece, I did not want to be separated from Nansen, and I very much wanted to go to Constantinople. I stammered, 'But I have no experience of refugee work, and I don't speak Greek or Turkish. What d'you expect me to do?'

Nansen laughed loudly.

'I don't expect anyone to do anything, except what's under his nose. I didn't know Russian, or what to do, when I went to Russia, and I don't speak Greek or Turkish any more than you do. Every man of good will can accomplish something. You will be my eyes and ears in Greece. Act as you think fit. I have every confidence in you.'

There was no quarrelling with this, and in the early hours of the morning, feeling very cold and forlorn, I got down at Nish. It really is not a very pleasant place, and I waited for some hours with sinking spirits. It may seem strange that, since we were concerned with the influx of a million and a half refugees into Greece, Nansen was going to Constantinople. He did so because he thought, probably quite rightly, that his first step should be to meet Kemal, and persuade him to desist from the wholesale butchery of the Greek Army. 'If,' said Nansen, 'we are to have a million and a half women and children, without men, on our hands, the situation may be a little difficult.' In the event, that was what we had: but he could not have known that he would fail with Kemal, and Nansen had always an unconquerable faith that heart-to-heart talks would settle everything.

At this point it may be asked why I was not pleased to be going to Greece; and the answer is that I do not know. For some obscure reason, Greece is a country which I have never liked, either in thought or in experience. Many English people adore it and have adored it. Its dramatic ruins are impressive, its history seems a clarion-call to humanity, its treeless hills and mountains have a certain grandeur. But for me it was and is a forbidding country. As far as it is possible to dislike a whole people (which of course is not possible) I dislike all Greeks. In 1922, at the age of twenty-six, I did not rationalize my feelings in this way. I only felt oddly allergic to Greece. That did not mean that I was allergic to the job. Political thought was far from me: I wished to serve Nansen and to mitigate the sufferings of refugees, to whatever nation they might belong. Crusaders don't love natives.

When the train for Athens drew into Nish, I was quite unprepared for my reception. I had not grasped the fact that Nansen was news wherever he went. No doubt someone at Nish had registered the notion that I was of his company, and passed it on. I had no sooner got on to the train than I was surrounded by a mass of chattering, gesticulating Greeks. They informed me that conditions in Salonika were worse than anything I could possibly imagine: that thousands of destitute refugees were pouring in every day: that housing and food were non-existent: that plague was spreading: and what was Dr Nansen – who had all the money in the world – going to do about it? As I had not the foggiest idea what Dr Nansen was going to do about it, the questions were embarrassing. I could only say, endeavouring to put on an owlish face, that I was not at liberty to disclose Dr Nansen's plans. At the frontier I was received like royalty: there wasn't actually a band to play 'See, the conquering hero comes!' but it felt like that. My spirit retreated like a snail into its shell. I longed to be anywhere else. At Salonika I was met by a limousine with a military escort before and behind. I felt a bloody fool. I was whisked to the Governor's palace, and pushed through a mass of humanity to his room. He seized my hand and wrung it, then drew me to a large window, and, pointing dramatically, said: 'Look!' I looked: and saw a vast courtyard with high walls, and beyond some iron gates a black yelling crowd of struggling humanity. The Governor said: 'They are starving, and we have no food in the town. What is Dr Nansen going to do?'

The situation, had it not been tragic, would have been idiotic. Here was I, a silly young man with no experience and no in-

structions, being asked to perform a sort of miracle of loaves and fishes. The trouble was that Nansen's reputation as a miracle-worker was great. It could not, I felt, be smirched. But what was I to do? I could only say that my instructions were to collect the facts for Dr Nansen, who would doubtless act upon them. 'Facts!' said the Governor derisively. 'There are the facts in front of you!' I said that I hoped he would enable me to see the refugee centres for myself and decide what was necessary. Morosely he agreed.

There followed ten days of growing uneasiness for me. In a car provided by the Governor I visited the squalid makeshift camps which had been hurriedly erected for the refugees. The winter cold was beginning, and it was obvious that the lack of clothing, warmth, food, and medicines would soon present a formidable problem. The tents were inadequate and the refugees were mostly dressed in the thinnest rags. They crowded round me, asking when aid would come. I told my interpreter to say 'Slowly, slowly it will come,' and a woman replied 'Slowly, slowly we die.' After two days I sent a long telegram to Nansen. Rereading it now, it seems to me an adequate summary of the amounts and kinds of food, blankets, clothes, medicines and tents which would soon be a matter of urgency. My telegram was not acknowledged: Nansen was pursuing Kemal and had no time for me. But the Greek press had plenty. My every movement was reported, and the comments gradually passed from hope and welcome to irritation and anger. What was Mr Fielden *doing*? Mr Fielden, unfortunately, did not know.

I could not stand it, and decided to leave for Athens, where at least there was a British Embassy. Conditions at that time were so chaotic that trains could not be boarded in stations: if they came in to a platform, they were instantly overwhelmed by refugees. It was necessary to walk some way down the line in darkness, and climb on to the train in a siding. There was an uncomfortable sensation that the train might be mobbed. In Athens things seemed even worse than in Salonika, and Lindley, the British Minister, was not sparing in his criticisms of Nansen and, naturally, of me. The British residents had formed a committee to deal with refugees, and had started a large camp. Nansen had done nothing; and obviously I was a silly amateur. I sent another long telegram: there was no reply. Frustrated and ashamed, I went to work in the British camp, where our main business was to delouse the refugees, to dig latrines, and to persuade these

Anatolian peasants, with a whip, to use them. It was not romantic. But I was just saved from despair by the members of the Greco-Bulgarian Commission, which had been set up under Colonel Corfe to supervise the exchange of populations consequent on frontier alterations. Corfe and his deputy, Lindsay, were towers of strength and humour. They laughed at my anxieties, plied me with cocktails, took me to bathe at Piraeus, and made me visit the Acropolis and Sounium.

After some ten days of this, I received a telegram. As I opened it, I thought, with a sigh of relief, 'At last!' The telegram said: 'Kindly arrange for Greek Government to pay their contribution immediately to my account Ottoman Bank. Nansen.' This was a bit steep. The Greeks had, with other nations, contributed to Nansen's fund, but it hardly seemed the moment to ask them to pay. However, the drachma was falling rapidly, and it was clear that the contribution would not be worth much if it were not paid quickly. I had a somewhat unpleasant interview with Doxiades, the Minister of Health: and the sum was paid. No sooner was that accomplished than I received another telegram, which read: 'Have thirty thousand blankets at three shillings each: kindly induce Greek Government to buy.' I trundled back to Doxiades, who told me: 'It's very kind of Dr Nansen, but an Italian firm has already offered us unlimited blankets at two shillings.' I don't blush easily, but I must have blushed scarlet on that occasion. Presently a third telegram arrived. It said: 'Proceed immediately overland Adrianople and there take over grain supplies as per instructions awaiting you.' This was too much. I did not see myself taking a mad train journey through Macedonia, and finding myself again isolated. I had had enough of Nansen's silence. I took ship and sailed for Constantinople.

Nansen, in the meanwhile, evaded by Kemal, had taken a Greek destroyer and sailed, in a very rough sea, for the coast of Asia. From the coast he intended to walk to Ankara and find Kemal. The High Commissioners in Constantinople, who were then the rulers of that almost beleaguered city, had other ideas. To them Nansen was a nuisance. A British destroyer was sent down to intercept his Greek one, and he was picked off and brought back to Constantinople. He arrived there, in a towering rage, soon after I did. It was raining in torrents, and I see him now, dripping and furious, his blue eyes sparkling with anger, the water flowing off his oilskins and dripping on the floor. But Nansen never blamed anyone: the fact that I had flouted his in-

structions did not matter. (I was by now in a sort of dotty haze: Constantinople seemed to be the most exciting city in the world.) Nansen explained that, under the Treaty of Mudania, the Greeks must now evacuate Eastern Thrace: but that an agreement (of which he gave me a copy) had been made with the Allied Commissioners to provide for the retention and removal of grain by the Greeks. It was a peculiar document (I still have it) which stated that 'civilians might take away all grain', and that 'military take all grain except what has been requisitioned from the Turkish inhabitants': and concluded with some menacing phrases, such as 'the protection and assistance afforded by the Allies would naturally cease the moment the Allied troops were withdrawn' and that 'Dr Nansen would have to make his own arrangements to protect such grain as might be left after their departure'. This really boiled down to the fact that Hilary St George Saunders had been (he had returned to Geneva) and I now was, Dr Nansen's 'own arrangements'. I departed for Eastern Thrace.

The train rumbled through the night. On either horizon villages, set on fire by the departing Greeks, were burning merrily. I had an almost undecipherable list of places where grain was stored, and of its Greek owners. Early in the morning, half-way to Adrianople, I got out of the train at a small stop whose name was on my list. I was marooned there for some hours. Then a car arrived with a peppery French colonel, who was in charge of one of the Allied Mixed Commissions. At this point of Thrace they had a French majority. He gloomily took me to their headquarters. The French officers there were cynical about England and the League, and pulled my leg unmercifully. In the middle of the night, trying to sleep on a hard floor, I overheard a wild quarrel between the colonel and the one British representative on the Commission. The Englishman was accusing the French of murdering Greeks right and left. I got up and put my head in: the colonel yelled at me to be gone. It was nightmarish.

But on the next morning the colonel, for some reason, relented. He gave me a car and a sheaf of papers from Greek farmers who had left their grain. I went circling around Eastern Thrace. It quickly became obvious that the whole business was absurd. The villages were in the hands of the Turks, and they were murderously determined to keep any grain that there was. It was in fact a rather frightening trip. I felt, and not without reason, that I might easily disappear. Eventually, I jumped on a train for Adrianople. There I went to the French Army Headquarters, for

it seemed obvious that, if the Greek grain was to be saved, soldiers would be needed. The French general received me on the barrack square, and said that there was nothing doing: the Greeks could starve for all he cared. Tired and angry, I flared out that he would have to answer to the League for his callousness. He replied dryly that if I said another word he would clap me in jail. I returned to Constantinople.

Nansen as usual neither condemned nor was discouraged by failures. He nodded his leonine head gravely over my detailed report, said that clearly there was nothing more to be done in that direction. He suggested that I should go with Major X to the Sea of Marmora where, with shipping facilities, some grain might be rescued. It was now becoming urgent to obtain supplies of grain – for three reasons. Famine conditions were likely in Greece: the Treaty of Mudania had given only a fortnight's breathing space before Thrace became Turkish: and Nansen had been tricked into buying a large quantity of grain from Rumania, which had turned out to be unfit for human consumption, and had been sunk in, I think, Chios harbour. All in all, Nansen and Philip Baker had so far made a mess of things: the pursuit of Kemal had failed, nothing had been done for Greece, and a large part of our slender funds had been lost. Oddly enough it did not occur to me then or later to criticize Nansen for his rather scatty proceedings, any more than it occurred to me, years later, to criticize Gandhi in his silliest moments. Such men have a radiance which has nothing to do with practical results. I daresay that Mr Selfridge would have made a much better job of Greek refugees than Nansen ever did: but then, the Selfridges of the world don't do such things, and Nansen did. .

I was not very pleased by Nansen's suggestion. Major X was a peppery little man who claimed to have been an officer in the Guards, though (and I cannot say why) I doubted this claim. He was all clipped grey mustache and glittering spectacles and fury, and I could not like him. Moreover the suggestion implied (and quite justifiably) that I hadn't done very well on my own. However, Nansen's word was law, and I embarked on a tug with Major X and sailed off down the Sea of Marmora. We had with us an interpreter, Marcou, and the Greek skipper of the tug, a shiftless dirty creature. The tug was tiny, uncomfortable, and filthy. The sea was extremely rough. We had, God knows why, no food or cigarettes. We were thrown about the tiny cabin, and at one time, when the skipper complained that he did not know

where he was because he could not see the Eregli light, we seemed in danger of foundering. Stumbling about, I put my hand through one of the small cabin skylights and cut an artery in my wrist, losing a good deal of blood before I got a tourniquet round it. It was altogether a rather vivid voyage.

Major X talked in a boastful manner which increased my distrust of him. Yelling above the wind and waves, he assured me that we must 'stamp on the bloody Turks' and 'pet the grain by force'. Yelling back at him, I attempted to convey a notion that representatives of the League couldn't have much truck with stamping and force. He roared back that I had made a fool of myself in Eastern Thrace, and I hated him the more. Presently we arrived at Sar K  y, near the entrance of the Dardanelles. It was a small village, but had been used in the past for grain shipments. There was a reasonable jetty, and several large warehouses full of grain, which was not, however, sacked. How, without sacks, could it be moved? 'You'll see,' said Major X, grimly. What I saw was that here also, as in Eastern Thrace, the Greek owners had fled and the Turks were likely to resist any transport of grain. And in fact Major X could do nothing: he said, grinding his false teeth, that we must return to Tekirdag to get assistance. I did not care for the sound of this.

At Tekirdag Major X went ashore, pointedly implying that I should not go with him, and climbed the hill to visit the Mixed Commission, which here was mainly British. While he was away I walked up and down the jetty with Marcou, who suddenly poured out his heart – or his lies – to me. He told me that Major X had been down here earlier, and had induced the Greek owners of grain to sign over their rights to him personally. He now held these papers, and, far from wishing to get the grain for Nansen, had made an agreement to sell it privately to a Greek firm, and thus make a huge profit. I should see, he told me, that a private ship would come to Sar K  y to take it. It might have been true: it might have been a tissue of lies: I could not tell. Major X returned with a platoon of soldiers, driving some ragged men before them. 'It's all right,' he said. 'I've got the caiques.' Sure enough a dozen caiques put out behind us. When we reached Sar K  y again, there was indeed a largish ship, flying (of all things) the Russian flag, standing out of the port. I said to Major X: 'But you aren't going to put the grain on *that* ship?' 'Mind your own business!' he returned. I said, 'Yes, I will: I'm going back to Constantinople.' He laughed and said: 'How?' How indeed. He

went ashore and left me. It was now raining in torrents and I have seldom felt so deserted. And then, quite suddenly, there occurred a miracle. A British destroyer swept up to the jetty. I was asked what on earth I was doing there. I explained as best I could. There were hoots of laughter: suddenly sanity returned. 'Could you take me to Constantinople?' Yes, they could and would: a bit of gunnery practice first, which might amuse me. I went aboard; and for the first, and I regret to say the last, time in my life, discovered the magic of the Navy. After the muddle and discouragement of the past months, I found myself miraculously in a world of smooth efficiency, sparkling cleanliness, comfort, good humour and gaiety. I knew just enough about gunnery to be able to appreciate what went on. I wondered (I think) why I wasn't in the Navy and what on earth I was doing fiddling around with refugees. It was as though I had suddenly been caught up into another world. Then they dropped me in Constantinople, and my problems returned. I learnt that Major X was back there, and imagined that he had probably complained to Nansen about me. I went to the Tokatljan Hotel and there wrote out a report for Nansen. When I had finished it, I crossed the hall to get an envelope from the porter's desk. I returned to my table to find that my manuscript had vanished. I could not be bothered to write it again. I felt deflated: Nansen could think what he liked.

Nothing ~~was~~, in fact, said: a curtain dropped over the episode: but no grain ever came from the Sea of Marmora. I remained for some weeks in Constantinople, working in the Nansen office. My experience had made me somewhat uneasy about what was being done: and, as an unpaid worker, I myself was an object of suspicion. But such embarrassments were offset by the glamour of Constantinople at that time. It was not only a beautiful and exciting city: it was also a dangerous and beleaguered one. Kemal's forces were around the town: the bridges were mined: rumour was constantly busy with a possible attack and massacre. I had some friends in the Irish Guards, who were stationed there, and Alexander, who was commanding them, insisted that I move to their quarters out of the Tokatljan Hotel, which he said was dangerous. Nevertheless we dined there every evening with Nansen, who would fascinate us with his stories of Polar voyages, and his theories on ocean currents: and would then ask the orchestra to play Grieg, and get up and dance to those melodies. In the afternoons I would sometimes walk with Nansen (and a

walk with him was a considerable exercise) round the walls: sometimes he would talk vividly: sometimes he would be glum and silent and depressed. On one occasion I said, looking down at the Golden Horn: 'How beautiful it is!' and Nansen, with a sort of anger in his blue eye, replied: 'Do you think so? All cities are hideous to me: they bring out the worst in men.'

The Greek tragedy of 1922 has been so much obscured by later greater slaughters that it has dwindled to a pinpoint in history now. The tiny part which I played is now a commonplace experience of thousands of 'relief' workers all over the world, and merits no detailed description here. I returned to Athens to form, at Nansen's request, a Committee which might co-ordinate the rather untidy work of the various relief organisations which were now appearing – the Quakers, the Near East Relief, the Save the Children Fund, the British Red Cross, and, last and richest, with a million dollars to spend, the American Red Cross under Ross Hill. You might have expected such organisations to show altruism and team-spirit: not at all. They might have been a collection of prima donnas. Not one of them would disclose its plans or activities or funds to another; and they kept up, except for the Quakers, a quite disreputable struggle to requisition the best houses and the best cars. The results were that nobody quite knew how many refugees there were, or where they were, or what was wanted: and there was no long-term plan. Nansen was perfectly right in wishing to consolidate these activities: but, although I got great help from Bentinck of the British Embassy and Colonel Corfe and others, it was a task which defeated me. I travelled round Greece and the Aegean Islands (with a never-to-be-forgotten four-hour stop at Delos, the most magical place I ever saw) and collected a formidable array of figures, showing the numbers, sex, age, and (what was more important) occupation of the refugees. At that moment Greece had a great opportunity. There were, among the refugees, thousands of skilled carpet-weavers, farmers, wine-growers, masons, fishermen, and, oddly enough, jewellers. They could have been absorbed into the Greek economy. But it was not done. I pleaded with Ross Hill for a realistic view which would deny all aid to the refugees unless they worked for it: without that, they would simply sit on their bottoms and be fed, and at the end of the million dollars, nothing would have been accomplished. Ross Hill argued, with that maddening blind American grandiosity which has since so wrecked the world, that he 'could not enter into politics, and was

only there to feed the refugees'. My hopes grew daily more threadbare: my enthusiasm waned. I sent (as I see from the papers I still have) angry telegrams to Philip Baker, saying that I was going to England and America to explain the position, and raise funds: and he replied gently, asking me to desist. I was also at loggerheads with the League, who wrote me that 'I appeared to be concentrating on *Russian* refugees'. I had indeed had to take these over in Nansen's name, and, since the wretched Cosacks in Greece (waiting for a problematical attack on Soviet Russia by Wrangel) had suffered more acutely than anyone, I arranged to send them back to Novorossiysk, thereby earning the enmity of Prince and Princess Demidoff, the Czarist representatives in Greece. You can see, I hope, that my position was complicated.

What with waning enthusiasm and growing exasperation, I found myself falling heavily in lust – it could hardly be dignified by the word love – with a blond young American who had come to work for the American Red Cross. He had large blue eyes and pink cheeks and was full of lofty thoughts and ideals. He was, I imagine, as much attracted to me as I to him, but homosexuality was for him a word never to be uttered. He assured me earnestly that we must go into partnership and remain together for life. That was not my idea. But the physical pull was so strong that when Hugh decided to leave Greece for America via Italy, I made up my mind to go too: and wrote to Nansen saying (as was true enough) that I did not think I could do any further useful work in Athens. The reactions to my decision were surprisingly strong. Nansen, though he never interfered in personal choices, deplored it: Adosides, the very charming Greek deputy who had been assigned to refugee questions, begged me with tears in his eyes to stay: Colonel Corfe said abruptly that I was behaving like a fool, that I now knew more about the problem than anyone, and that, if I had patience, I should be at the head of it all. My ears were deaf to all such advice, though I was slightly peeved when I overheard Adosides say, in Greek, 'It's the American who's pulling him.'

I found myself in a Florentine hotel with Hugh. and Sandro at once came round to see me. Having been introduced to Hugh, he exploded with mirth and his laughter echoed round my room. He asked me if I knew what a great fool I looked, gawping at this doll of an American: could I really be so silly as to suppose that this pink baby was worth a moment's thought? I looked at

Hugh through Sandro's mocking eyes, and the spell was broken. My lust disappeared like a flash of lightning. I said a brief good-bye to Hugh, whose blue eyes held astonished pain, and went south with Sandro. Lust, I suddenly felt, was no substitute for gay untrammelled friendship.

There now ensued six months which were perhaps the happiest, certainly the most carefree, of my life. Both Sandro and I were almost without money, but it did not matter: at that time it was possible to live quite adequately in Italy for three or four shillings a day, and Sandro was beginning to sell pictures here and there. By the cheapest methods of transit, and often on our feet, we wandered over Italy, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. Sandro painted for eight or nine hours every day, and I, sitting behind him, copied him as best I could, and learnt the technique of painting in a haphazard but delightful way. Laughter was with us, and we were always in the midst of silly adventures. Apart from finding myself swallowed up in Italian life, warm and gay and irresponsible, my eye was alerted to notice the beauty of people and places, skies and water, trees and grasses ruffled by the breeze, details of architecture and of painting. Every human being, no matter how small the talent, should make the effort to put down what is seen: a new clarity of vision is obtained, which adds for ever afterwards a new dimension to life. Finding this grow in me, I was entranced, and felt sure that I must become a painter and nothing else. Away with all ideas of relief, reform, organisation and the rest! The only life worth living was the life of the individual, roaming where he would, with no bosses and no routine! These brave ideas were a little deflated when Sandro's mother became suddenly and dangerously ill, and he was summoned home. Life without him was much less amusing. I decided that I must go and work at the Slade School. This was a foolish and conventional decision: I had an idea that it would give me a sort of respectable degree in art, and thus mitigate the disapproval of my relations and friends.

But to be poor in Italy was one thing, and to be poor in London was quite another. This particular facet of experience taught me how futile and mistaken are socialist doctrines which aim at equal standards of life for all. The pinch of poverty or the enjoyment of riches depends on many undefinable and shifting factors: climate, convention, character, snobism, age, upbringing, *et al.* In Italy it did not matter how I dressed or ate or lived: in London, because I knew people, it did. I was trying to

act two irreconcilable roles: the son of a MFH at one moment, a shabby student in Gower Street at another. And the Slade was hardly helpful in reconciling me to this ambivalent life. Professor Tonks had 'passed' my paintings, and even muttered that they showed some promise: but in class, as was his way, he would ask me in a loud voice why I had ever thought of painting, and whether I shouldn't be better advised to take up knitting at once. I could have stood these pleasantries better if I had not had, on either side of me, Oliver Messel and Rex Whistler, who, blithely ignoring both Tonks and the model, drew with a facility which I knew, with desperate melancholy, was altogether beyond me. With each conscientious sketch, I saw my talent more clearly for the poor little thing it was.

Destiny chose this moment to move Philip Noel-Baker to ring me up, and to say that Lord Parmoor, who had become Lord President of the Council in the new (and first) Labour Government, needed a secretary for League of Nations affairs, and I was the very person. I was depressed, and the prospect of being secretary to a Cabinet Minister was glamorous. I knew that everyone, from my father onwards, would applaud. I wrote to Tonks telling him of the offer, and saying that, since he had so much discouraged me, perhaps I should take it? I hoped by this letter to sting him into some expression of faith in me as a painter. As I might have known, nothing of the sort occurred. Tonks replied briefly that if I had not the perseverance necessary to an artist, I had best give it up immediately. I thought at the time he was right, but I have since realised that he was entirely wrong. Perseverance does not make artists. Only talent does that. Talent may bring perseverance in its train, but the artist is born, not made. Tonks's letter, in any case put paid to my career at the Slade.

I went to interview Lord Parmoor, and, in response to his questions, told him a great many fat lies. Among other things he asked me if I wrote shorthand, and I said that I did. This claim was expiated later in tears and sweat, when I had to take down not only letters dictated by him but also minutes of committees. I used to scribble what I could in longhand and make up the rest from memory. Parmoor and other celebrities used to mutter 'I don't think I said *that*,' and I would reply quickly, riffling through my notebook, 'But I have it down here.' I am amazed to think that I got away with it, but I did.

So there I was. A new life began. Pin-stripe trousers, black

coat, bowler hat, arrival at the Treasury at nine a.m. every morning. I was absolutely the world's worst secretary. I forgot everything and muddled what I did not forget. Fortunately I was young and my mind was quick, so that I could often recover myself. I did not at all like Parmoor, who seemed to me a rather unpleasant and silly old man. But at first I was a good deal impressed by the job. Paley, the tremendously dignified porter of the Treasury, treated me with great deference, and I had not had any deference for a long while. I had access to the Cabinet room, which then seemed very thrilling. I sat in the secretaries' box in the House of Lords, and ran down to correct, in Hansard, the many mistakes which Parmoor always made. Dignitaries of all sorts, from the Archbishop of Canterbury onwards, sat in my room waiting to see Parmoor. We even had visits from Queen Mary. My room looked out on the Horse Guards Parade, and it was all very grand. Best of all perhaps were the red boxes containing despatches from Ambassadors. I had a key for these, and it so happened that they travelled, by routine, from Buckingham Palace to my office, so that I was the first to see anything that the King had written. On one occasion, when Alexander of Yugoslavia had done something dictatorial, the King had taken a new sheet of paper and written on it, in blue pencil, 'Dear! Dear! Whatever are we coming to?' I thought this direction of foreign policy so delicious that I was tempted to extract the sheet and frame it – for who, except the King, could ever know, and what could he say? I desisted because I thought it would not be believed.

Society now drew me into its orbit. Because I was young and a bachelor and (I suppose I must add) an Etonian, as well as being in a position which people might regard as promising a political career, invitations poured in and all doors were opened to me. A week-end at Arundel, the Duchess of Devonshire's Ball, the reception at Londonderry House, and so on. The road of success was opening before me. But I felt myself a tramp on that road. I wanted to hide in the ditch. I tried hard to be at ease but never succeeded. Between these glamorous people and myself some chasm yawned. I was hopeless at all parlour tricks: poor in small-talk, stupid at bridge, a bad dancer, a rabbit at tennis and uninterested by racing. I came to know the faces photographed in *The Tatler*, but I was never quite of their company. I could just get by, and that was all. Gradually everything went sour on me. I began to loathe Westminster and the long dreary debates I

had to attend. I was cured for ever of any desire to become a politician: it seemed to me, as it still seems, the most boring life imaginable. When the Labour Government fell, I was delighted to be free. I thought gaily that I would return to Italy and join Sandro again in the best sort of life I had ever known. And at that moment, like the sudden toll of a bell, came a letter from his uncle, saying that Sandro had died in Tunis. It enclosed a pencilled scrawl, written during his last illness, asking me to 'come out soon'.

This was a deadly blow. Italy had, I suppose, if only half-consciously, remained at the back of my mind as a refuge, a delight always to be rediscovered. Now it vanished. Without the gay company of Sandro it was unimaginable: and indeed for many years I did not return to it. What was I to do? Despondently I looked at myself. I was twenty-eight, and when you are twenty-eight (with the dreadful thirty looming on the horizon), you may begin to feel that you are a failure. I had run around a good deal, but had nothing to show for it. I was no good at anything. I did not even know what I wanted to do – except to run away, somehow, from all organised life. It did not then occur to me that a varied experience of life may be valuable. I saw only (as others may see) a long sad succession of scatterbrained globe-trottings. So, when Oliver Baldwin suggested that I go and live with him on a poultry-farm in Oxfordshire, I thought, madly, that this was perhaps my destiny and my proper place.

Oliver was a remarkable person, and I was much under his influence at that time. I had known him slightly at Eton, where his very individual behaviour had amused me. I had also come to know his family. I had been at Aix-les-Bains with Stanley and Lucy Baldwin when Oliver returned from his six prisons and two revolutions in Turkey and Armenia. He was then in a rather daft, but splendidly daft, state of mind, with a sizzling white-hot anger against the world in general and his father in particular, in spite of the fact that Stanley Baldwin had rescued him, by an exchange of prisoners, from a condemned cell. He paced up and down the room at Aix, unfolding to my admiring ear his plans for a better world, and I was spellbound. Possibly the fact that his father was Chancellor of the Exchequer increased the spell, though I don't think so. I was at a stage of life when all rebellion seems glamorous. And Oliver, besides having a good mind, was a witty and engaging companion. I was convinced that he was marked out for a great career, and even now I am

puzzled that he failed to scale the political heights. In 1924 I was quite ready to become his disciple on a poultry-farm. I was in a strange mood of self-abasement, and felt that the further I could get from the madding crowd the better. Thus I fell into a kind of slavery, which astonishes me when I look back upon it. In the evenings I was Oliver's attentive audience, listening with respect to his speeches, writings, and plans. In the day I did all the chores, pumping up the bathwater (a quite heavy task), and cleaning out the houses of the hens and geese. Oh, the damned geese! I had done some dirty jobs in Greece but nothing compared (as anyone who knows it must agree) with the filth of geese. I grew to hate them so much that I could not even eat them. When they hissed at me, I would have liked to cut off their silly heads. But I was not in the least unhappy. The country routine suited my state of mind: Oliver entertained me: and at week-ends there was always a sprinkling of intelligent and amusing guests. I was quite content to remain a sort of background for Oliver, and might have so continued had I not, after some seven or eight months, fallen desperately in love for the first time in my life. The object of my affections (so reason told me) was unlikely, improbable, and unsuitable. It did not matter: I was caught like a rabbit in the glare of physical attraction, and blinded to all else. I could think of nothing (except when I was in a turmoil of jealousy), save one person and one act. I became, naturally, an unmitigated bore. Oliver, finding the attention of his disciple apt to wander, grew impatient with me. I saw that my days at Watlington were numbered, but I did not care. My love burnt itself merrily out, and exploded with the usual agony. I descended into a suicidal melancholy. Nothing mattered any more. Escape offered itself suddenly in an unexpected letter from William J. Locke, the novelist, who wrote asking me to go and stay with him at Cannes. I had met him and his adopted daughter Sheila by some chance, and had liked them very much: I had not met Mrs Locke. It seemed quite a good idea to go to the Riviera, which I had never seen, under such auspices. (I think that I had some vague idea that I might blow out my brains in the Casino, after losing my all.) I travelled to Marseilles with Oliver, who was going to visit his uncle in Algiers, and proceeded to Cannes.

I sat on a sunlit terrace while Sheila dispensed cocktails. Presently Mrs Locke appeared. Seeing me, she stopped dead in her tracks, and exclaimed: 'My God! It isn't possible!' Introductions

were made, and no more was said: I wondered if she was not right in the head. A few days later, she asked me whether I would care to go over to Monte Carlo with her. I said that I should be delighted to see Monte. When we arrived, she directed the chauffeur to the Royalty Bar, and as soon as we were seated there, called a waiter and told him to go across to the Park Palace – a nest of luxury flats just opposite – and ask Madame d'Alvarez to come down. After a time an elegant figure emerged from the Park Palace. Faultlessly dressed in the manner of eighteen, Diana d'Alvarez might have been anything between forty and sixty. She was certainly good-looking in a ravaged way. When she saw me, she paled in a manner which I have read about in fiction but never seen before or since. The rouge on her cheeks stood out like two setting suns. Staggering to a chair, she murmured: 'Brandy!' The brandy was brought at the double. I thought, all these people are utterly mad.

We had lunch with Madame d'Alvarez, and when we left she pressed my hand and said: 'Come and see me when next you are in Monte.' I assented vaguely: I did not expect to see her or Monte again. But shortly before the end of my visit, Mrs Locke told me that she was sending the car to Monte Carlo, and perhaps I would care to go. I said that certainly it would be fun to try my luck at the tables. But after an hour of the Sporting Club, I wearied of that form of pleasure. I had very little money to lose and I lost it quickly. When I emerged into the sunshine, I wondered what to do while waiting for the car. It struck me that I might get a cup of tea off Madame d'Alvarez, and I made my way to the Park Palace. Arrived there, I saw through the double doors that a bridge party was in progress, and tried to make my escape. But Madame d'Alvarez came rushing out, propelled me into a small boudoir, and hissed: 'Wait here, I'll send them all away.' I stammered, 'But I shouldn't dream...' But she was gone. There were voices and then silence. Madame d'Alvarez returned, and settled herself on a sofa. Tea was brought in. 'They've all gone,' she said. 'Now we can talk.' What on earth was this, I asked myself? Curiouser and curiouser. Was the woman mad? She asked what my plans were, and when I said that I was returning to England in three days time, exclaimed: 'Oh, but *why*? Look, I've got a party for Maurice Maeterlinck's birthday the day after tomorrow, and I'm having the whole restaurant decorated with blue birds: there'll be the King and Queen of Montenegro and the Grand Duke Andrew and the Phillips Oppenheims

and Lily Langtry and Mary Garden and others: now why don't you come over and be my special guest?' In the light of today, such a party may sound a ludicrous bore: I suppose I must have thought it very exciting: I fell for it. I moved over to a small and cheap hotel in Monte. When the party was over, Diana d'Alvarez said: 'Now the Oppenheims have invited us to lunch at Sospel tomorrow, and the Grand Duke wants us for dinner at the Negresco – you can't refuse *that*, it's a Royal Command!' And, hey presto, I had become a Riviera gigolo. It did not, of course, strike me like that, because I kept to my hotel, and went out only to the large parties which she or others gave every day: I was fascinated by the raffish Riviera life, and the streams of money thrown away: and every day I decided to return to England tomorrow. And every day postponed it. I was dazzled by the pageant of wealth and also exhausted by it. Parties went on into the small hours every night, and at eight in the morning the indefatigable Diana would be ringing me up to announce another and another. It took me about three months to realize that, in Riviera eyes, I had become the *cher ami*, the lapdog, and the property of Madame d'Alvarez. When this eventually dawned on me, I made haste to depart. Diana d'Alvarez was aghast. 'But,' she cried 'why, why, why?' I tried to explain that I couldn't spend my life on the Riviera, and must find a *job*. It did not, in that environment, sound at all convincing. 'A *job*?' exclaimed Diana, staring at me. 'Well, if you must have a *job*, I hold about half the shares in Dry Monopole, and I suppose you could go into the Paris office, couldn't you?' I thanked her very much, and said that I did not think I should be any good at selling champagne. Madame d'Alvarez paled behind her rouge. 'I must talk to you seriously,' she said. 'I'll tell you what, we'll go over to tea at the Negresco.' On the way along the Corniche road, she developed a new and staggering plan. 'I see,' she said, 'that you're bored with this Riviera life: well, perhaps it *is* boring. I'll tell you what. I sell pills all over the world. You see, I got very fat at one time, and had to go away and starve myself – lie under sandbags and all that. It was very successful and I came back quite slender again. People wanted to know how I did it. So I invented some pills – nothing in them, of course, but they've had a great success everywhere – oh yes, America, South America, all over the place. Now I'd rather like to go and see if I'm getting the profits or being cheated. What say we take the Rolls and the Peugeot and go all around the world? How would

you like that?' Well, I thought, it's quite an offer. To go round the world in comfort and *gratis* wouldn't happen to me again. There was a moment of dreadful temptation. Then I saw myself trailing in Diana's wake. No.

That evening, when I saw her out of the car, at the Park Palace, and accompanied her into the hall, she fainted, or pretended to faint – I shall never know. She fell in a heap at my feet. I picked her up and carried her to the flat, and laid her on a sofa. The next day I left for England. I never saw her again. It isn't a moral tale.

I arrived in England. My father, stepmother and sister were just about to leave, with a girl called Myrtle Kellett, on a Mediterranean cruise. My father, as I have indicated, hated 'abroad', and I don't think he ever intended to go. At the last moment he fell diplomatically ill with influenza. Everything had been booked and couldn't be cancelled. I don't think it's much of an exaggeration to say that, like the *Snark*, they had forty-two cases all carefully packed with their names clearly painted on each – to say nothing of my stepmother's lady's-maid, already on board. My stepmother said that I must take the girls. I protested that I did not want to go on any cruise: I had to stay in England now and find a *job*. She pooh-poohed that, said I had been wasting my time anyway, and another six weeks would not matter. I found myself on board the *Otranto*, with two seventeen-year-old girls in tow. It was my first, and undoubtedly my last, experience of a cruise. I would prefer Hell. There was a Master of Ceremonies, and a grisly never-ceasing attempt to make everyone 'matey' – and nearly all the horrid people on board wanted to be just that. We were expected to join merrily in deck games, lotteries, whist-drives, and dances. Every other night there was what was called a 'running' dinner, which meant that everybody was forbidden to keep to his own table but must join another and be matey. At Tangier we poured off the ship in waves of crowded boats, and, once on shore, found ourselves with the darling passengers wherever we went. It was the same in the Balearic Islands, the same in Barcelona. Then, to my horror, I found that we were steaming up to Monte Carlo. God in Heaven, I said to myself, I am now going to be mixed up between Diana and these two girls. I think I must have been sweating with apprehension by the time we arrived in front of the Casino. Fortunately for me, Marguerite van Buren, an American lovely with whom I had made friends, was circling the Place in her car. 'What on earth

are *you* doing here?' she cried. I hissed at her: '*Is Diana here?*' 'No, gone to Paris'. I breathed again. Marguerite whisked us up to her flat. From that moment everything became brilliant: we were offered lunches, cars, boats, anything we fancied. People came rushing in to see me. I drew Marguerite into a corner and said: 'But what is all this *about*? People here were never so nice to me before.' She opened wide blue eyes and replied: 'But don't you *know*?' I said I didn't know what she was talking about. 'But nobody would ever dare to invite you – you were Diana's beau!' 'I wasn't anything of the kind!' 'Of course you were – but didn't Mrs Locke *tell* you?' 'Mrs Locke told me nothing.' 'But, don't you see, Diana had a beau called Captain Chesney, Mary Garden's half-brother, and he died in Deauville just before you arrived – and *you were the exact image of him!*' She added: 'Wait a moment,' opened a drawer and showed me a photograph: it was indeed very like me. 'You see?' I did see, at last. 'We are all fond of Diana and she was desperate: Mrs Locke thought you were a gift from Heaven: so did Diana.'

We were magnificently entertained to lunch and dinner, sent to drive along the Corniche, taken to the Sporting Club. Myrtle and my sister, who had been getting more and more bored by the *Otranto*, thought this fine. In the evening a gale blew up, and we were accosted by a dim little man off the ship who warned us: 'Better get back, last launch leaving!' Our hosts laughed and said that they would send us in their private launch. So we set off at one a.m. in a rough sea and scrambled dramatically aboard. All this made the girls feel that Monte was tremendous and they pleaded with me that we should leave the *Otranto* at Toulon and return there. It was a mad idea but I agreed. Thompson the lady's maid was packed off in angry tears to London, and we sent a wild telegram to the family: 'Feel *Otranto* definitely unsafe: going Monte Carlo.' The odd thing about that was that the next night the *Otranto* ran into Cape Matapan and buckled her bows, and the passengers were sent home. The family were of course scandalised by our action, and angry wires arrived. However, we had about a hundred pounds between us and decided to spend it. How to do so was obvious. Myrtle and my sister had already worked out, alas, a 'system'. We spent a week at the tables, and had just enough, at the end, to get us back to London.

Thus with a whimper and no bang I came to the end of ten years wandering. I was now not only without a job, I was also without the smallest idea of what job I wanted or how to get one

at all. I pulled what strings I could without avail, and then, descending lower, began to read and reply to advertisements. Round and round I went, to publishers, to business firms, to oil companies, to advertising agencies, waiting in queues and sometimes being interviewed. The nadir came when I applied as a commercial traveller for Kelly's Directories – and was turned down. I daresay I was not very prepossessing and my record was not good: but there was one definite blot against me everywhere – that I had been connected with the Labour Government. In those days that was still a crime. Depressed and anxious, I became ill. I had for a long time been dogged by a recurrence of Gallipoli dysentery, and I was now advised to see Aldo Castellani, the specialist in tropical diseases. He put me into his clinic in Putney and there for three weeks I lived on three glasses of milk a day and had emetine injections. I emerged as light as a feather, and at this moment Philip Baker flew into my life again. He wrote saying that Hilda Matheson, the Talks Director of the BBC, was looking for an assistant, and perhaps I would like to go to lunch in Eaton Place and meet her.

I had never listened to a radio, and had only a very vague idea of what the BBC was or did. However – any port in a storm, and I gratefully accepted the invitation. On the morning of it I was seized with a paralysing dysenteric tummy cramp. Furiously I rang up Castellani, and told him he hadn't cured me. He said, 'Come round here.' I went to Hatley Street where, as was usual in Castellani's practice, patients were waiting all over the house and even sitting on the stairs. Presently he came, jabbed a needle into me, and said, 'Now you'll be all right.' Miraculously I quickly was, and took a taxi to Philip's house. In the taxi I began to feel that my feet were turning into huge balls of cotton wool, and the driver's head got further and further away. In Eaton Place I just managed to get out, rang the bell with an arm which seemed to be a mile long, and fell down the steps in a dead faint. And so I first met Hilda Matheson, and, after Irene Baker had treated me with strong coffee (and I had cursed Castellani and all his works), talked to her. My fifteen years in radio began. But only after difficulties which will be related later.

I had left the bypaths for a main road, and exchanged variation for a career. Was it a good thing? No: it wasn't. The world, of course, does not approve of people who run from one thing to another, and does not crown them with success. The brief span of human life allows time for only two kinds of success: brilliance

or application – the genius or the plodder. I was neither brilliant nor a plodder. I was that uneasy misfit, the artist without talents. Such an individual is happy only when he is not tied by routine, by bosses, by regulations, by ordered hours of work, by organisation and organisations – in short by all our civilized slavery. But he has no wings to lift him above this man-made swamp of – to him – despair. He can choose only between the frustration of the clerk and the failure of the artist. In 1927 I was enchanted to be ‘safe’ at last – to have a settled place and a salary, to be part of a rapidly-developing institution, and to be offered what seemed to be (and indeed to a large extent was) congenial work. Looking back, I now think that my first great mistake in life was my letter to Tonks: my second was lunch in Eaton Place. Not that I am ungrateful to Philip Noel-Baker, who certainly did his best to turn me into a useful member of society. But that was not my role. I should have been a mediocre painter but a competent one. Perhaps I should have drifted into making lampshades or designing dust-covers or ladies’ hats: and maybe I should have had my private and individual moments of anger and frustration: but never, I think, the great black asphyxiating anger and frustration with which bureaucracy, for the next twenty years, enveloped me.

Chapter Three

*I conceive some scattered notions about a superior power •
to be of singular use for the common people, as furnishing
excellent materials to keep children quiet when they grow
peevish, and providing topics of amusement in a tedious
winter-night.*

JONATHAN SWIFT

IN THAT YEAR, 1927, when my faltering footsteps first crossed the anything-but-august threshold of Savoy Hill, the British Broadcasting Corporation was born, and Mr J. C. W. Reith became its first Director General. (The company had, of course, existed since 1922). 1927 also saw – or heard – the first two racing ‘commentaries’ (the Grand National and the Derby), the first ‘commentary’ on a football match, and the first broadcast of a symphony concert from the Queen’s Hall – this last an innovation greatly resented by listeners. Another year was to pass before the first broadcasts of a BBC Dance Orchestra (under Jack Payne), and yet another three before Adrian Boult conducted a BBC Symphony Orchestra. In 1927 the BBC was poised for its flight into the ether, and it was precisely this flutter of untried wings which was, at least for me, its chief and great attraction. Almost nothing was known about the transmission of sound through the microphone, and the shape of things to come was still fluid. Mistakes were constantly made, and every day was an experiment. The future was still uncertain, and money was in short supply – one guinea for a quarter-of-an-hour talk; programmes were scrambled together from day to day, and, when they failed or ran short (for we had hardly begun to learn the possibility of exact timing) there were no easy gramophone records, or even Bow Bells, to fill the gap. The gaps were filled in those days by the charming Cecil Dixon, who tinkled Chopin on the piano, and announced each number in a shy little voice. She should have a place in any BBC history. Fleet Street, so much more ancient and pontifical, looked upon this new toy with an amused and indulgent eye, though there were some, like Lord Riddell, whose eye held a faint alarm. In the formative years before 1932, the BBC was a new and exciting dish, sizzling over the fire, with

Reith as *chef de cuisine*, and perhaps too many cooks spoiling the broth: by 1932 it was the heavy though doubtless healthy pudding which it remains – rather soggy now to my taste. When I listen today to the same old variety shows, the same old feature programmes, the same old commentaries, all so smooth and efficient now, and the plummy announcers' voices with their bedside-manner of conveying expurgated news, I sigh for the muddles and mistakes of the past. We may have been silly, but we were never complacent. And, God save us, we really believed that broadcasting could revolutionize human opinion.

When Hilda Matheson had seen and approved me, despite the effects of my polyglandular injection, she told me that she herself could not appoint me. For that I should have first to be 'interviewed' by Reith and Admiral Cargill, the Deputy Director General. Remembering Burlington House, I quailed a little at this. I also remembered the series of unsuccessful commercial interviews. I was not much good at it (perhaps, I thought, I have halitosis or so). And my record would not appeal to any pundit. Why did you give up painting? Why have you been so long unemployed? Why did you not take a degree? Questions without answers. I approached Savoy Hill and Mr Reith in no easy frame of mind. And Mr Reith made it no easier. Since I am two inches over six feet myself, I am apt to get an inferiority complex, or an attack of bad temper (much the same thing) when anyone towers over me. And Mr Reith not only towered, but intended to tower. Instantly I had the impression – quite a mistaken one – of an insufferable tyrant. Reith in fact had and has one of the largest inferiority complexes ever known to man and, as is the way of such things, it makes him arrogant. I was intimidated, as who would not have been, by this giant with piercing eyes under shaggy eyebrows, and the scarred cheek which somehow suggested ruthlessness. He snapped at me immediately: 'Why d'you want to come into broadcasting?'

I had no answer to that one. Or rather, the correct answer wouldn't do. 'Because I've been turned down even as a commercial traveller for Kellys Directories, and I'd take any damned job that offered.' I murmured some bromide about a new development which had immense possibilities. 'Getting in on the bandwagon, eh?' I reflected that perhaps there was something in that. Since I was extremely vague about what I should have to do in the BBC, I could not say that I should be good at it. 'I suppose,' pursued Mr Reith, with a cutting edge to his voice, 'you know

that you won't make any *money* here? This is a dedicated service: we don't want people who are after money.' (I wondered what his salary was). He added abruptly: '£400 a year – that's about all you're likely to get.' Since I was earning nothing, and did not seem likely to, this remark did not bother me: what I wanted at that moment was not money but security. I had, however, an uncomfortable feeling that, once again, I had made a bad impression. Reith, after giving me a long stare which seemed to expose my mildewed soul, said: 'You'd better go up and see Admiral Carpendale.'

Carpendale, a handsome blue-eyed man with a barking manner, said, 'Miss Matheson recommends you, but I don't know why. What can you *do*?' These questions were frightful. *Do*? Well, Admiral Carpendale, I can paint in water-colours rather badly, I can speak French and Italian and a little German, and I'm rather good at digging latrines. I stammered that I had a fairly good knowledge of literature and poetry. 'Literature and poetry?' barked Carpendale. 'My dear chap, this is *broadcasting*!' He considered me for a while, and then said: 'Better try you out as an announcer.' He rang a bell, and said to a secretary: 'Take this man to Number 5 and give him a news bulletin to read: put it on a closed circuit.' This was my first sight of a microphone or, come to that, a studio. I stumbled through the news bulletin. 'Well,' said Carpendale, with a sort of snarling satisfaction, when I returned to his office, 'no good as an announcer, that's a sure thing.' I left Savoy Hill with my tail between my legs.

I was not, therefore, surprised when Hilda Matheson told me that Reith and Carpendale had not approved of me, and did not wish me to be appointed. 'But never mind,' she added, 'I'll get over that: you'll see.' And so she did. In due course I became a member of the Talks Department at £400 a year. I felt that I was there on trial and on sufferance, and I sensed a strange hostility towards me among the BBC staff. I therefore strained every nerve to carry out the tasks assigned to me with scrupulous care, and to exercise what charm I could. I had a positive terror that at any moment I should be sacked. And that is, now, a strange thing to look back upon. I was completely wrong, and I did not realize my error until thirty years later. In 1957 Gerald Cock, who had settled in San Francisco and was making a tour of Europe, came to stay with me in Italy. Gerald had been a highly successful administrator of the BBC. He was, among other things, the first Director of television, and the first representative

of the BBC in America. I had not known him well, and had sometimes thought his fizzing energy a little exaggerated: so that I was surprised when he invited himself to stay. Gossiping about the past, he said: 'Ah! how well I remember the time when you came to the BBC. You were the 'wonder boy' who had been everywhere and done everything. We were all terrified of you.' I was staggered by this. I replied that I didn't believe it: it was I who had been terrified. 'Oh no,' he said, 'we thought you would be Director General.'

Two years later, I had a visit from Florence Milnes, that charming intelligent woman who battled (and it was a battle) for thirty-three years to build up the BBC Library, and was thereby – and will be – of matchless assistance to countless programme builders. When we were in doubt about any personality, any date, any event, any reference, a trip to Miss Milnes in the library would settle the matter without fuss and without apparent effort. She too should have a place in any history of the BBC. When she came to see me in Italy, she had already retired, and I had not seen her for many years. I happened to express my surprise at Gerald Cock's remark, and she said at once: 'I can tell you exactly what people thought when you came to Savoy Hill. You were the man of courage and money who *would stand up to Reith*. People were frightened of you, because they thought that you might make them lose their jobs.'

I imagine that these two quite disinterested opinions must be somewhere near the truth. At the time I was a million miles from imagining anything of the kind. I thought that I was badly equipped for the job, that I might easily get the sack, and that the whole staff, with the exception of Hilda Matheson, despised me. I had, as I now see, an opportunity which I failed to seize. Equally, I am inclined to think that the BBC might have made more use of my services than it did. My experience, disorderly and aimless as it might have seemed, fitted the BBC, as it then was, perfectly. I had travelled more than most young men of my age, I had made the acquaintance of a great many distinguished people in various walks of life, I was by that time well read and had a wide knowledge of English poetry, I spoke four languages, knew something about art and politics, and was musically fairly well educated. This dilettantism was exactly suited to the needs of the BBC. I was of course a flunkey: all broadcasting officials are flunkies, bowing the arts in and out of the studio: but a BBC flunkey could have considerable effect on programmes. And a

BBC flunkey, to be effective, had to be a queer kind of mongrel: in racing parlance you might call him Entertainment by Impresario out of Scholarship. As in all mass entertainment, there was always the danger that, in the words of Burke, 'learning will be cast into the mire and trodden down under the heels of a swinish multitude'. Such a danger is illustrated today by programmes such as Mrs Dale's Diary and by the BBC 'Variety' programmes – the most vulgar broadcasting in the whole civilized and uncivilized world. There is also the danger of preaching to a minority of the converted by becoming too highbrow, as the Third Programme now does. The broadcasting flunkey has to steer a course between vulgarity and obscurantism, pulling the one up and the other down, until a lucid and agreeable programme is obtained. It is not so easy as it sounds.

The phenomenal rise of broadcasting has never yet found its troubadour and probably never will. Yet it could be a great song. From the whiskered crystal set of 1920 ('I can actually hear a voice!') to the mammoth of Portland Place in 1932 was a giant stride. Reith, with his volumes of beautifully written and detailed diaries, should have been the man to sing that song: but his voice failed him. (And there were reasons for that.) Many others have attempted it, but none, I think, with success. I have no desire to compete. I was, as I have said and shall say again, no more than a flunkey of the microphone.

The tenemental building in Savoy Hill, with its creaking lift and narrow stone staircase, where the solemn Mr Chilman (still, I believe, with the BBC), presided over a tiny reception desk, was the reverse of glamorous. The 'studios' were mostly small rooms with distressing echoes, and 'v' no means soundproof. The atmosphere was one-third boarding school, one-third Chelsea party, one-third crusade. Or possibly the crusade bulked a little larger. There was the same feeling of dedication and hope which had characterised the League of Nations in its earliest days. All causes seem good when they are new and untried: and all, in the end, except individual creation, are spoiled by human mediocrity. Hitler was perfectly right when, in *Mein Kampf*, he wrote that no organisation should ever be run by more than a dozen people at most: proliferate your staff, and you're done for. At Savoy Hill, luckily for us, we were short of staff and money, and there was violent and healthy competition between the various 'departments'. 'Talks' thought that 'Variety' was vulgar: 'Variety' thought that 'Talks' should not exist: 'Talks' and 'Variety'

thought that 'Music' over the microphone was hopeless: 'Sport' seemed an odious frivolity: as for 'Drama' – well, I ask you, plays which you couldn't *see*! At about this time Aldous Huxley wrote me a letter which I still possess about 'broadcast' programmes – 'plays I cannot take: these disembodied voices make me physically sick.' In fact we had no more idea than the makers of silent films of the shape which broadcasting would eventually take: in the meantime, every day was a challenge.

I was often asked, in the years that followed, 'but what do you *do*?' Well, what does a broadcasting official *do*? The answer is that he can, if he so desires, mould public opinion exactly as he wishes. Or perhaps not exactly, but very nearly. I don't believe that there was any time in my years at the BBC, when, had I been fanatically convinced by Communist or Labour or Tory doctrine, I could not have puffed it enormously. (Luckily for me, I never was convinced by any doctrine.) Authority can never control broadcast programmes: in the last resort, it is the producer who controls them, and, if he is ingenious, he can 'put over' any point of view. The music 'director' who likes Scarlatti or Bach or Mozart or Bartok will – even unconsciously – slant programmes in their direction, and listeners will become familiar with them: the play producer who likes Shakespeare or Ibsen or Pirandello or Noel Coward will do likewise: and so on. Greater dangers await the producer of the 'spoken word'. Try as he may to be 'impartial' – that fearful symmetry which is never possible – he will, through his own taste, slant programmes towards what he likes. The elemental fact about broadcasting is its tremendous output. You may have all the authorities and restrictions and committees and regulations: but they are all defeated by the rapidity of successive programmes. Once, with Peter Fleming, I did a summary of the year's news (on New Year's Eve, of course), and I think that almost every phrase in that broadcast was controversial and dangerous. But we used four experienced broadcasters, speaking very rapidly, and although many listeners were outraged, none could remember exactly what had been said. That is an illustration of the fact that broadcasting gallops so fast across the hours that its impact is not consciously felt until it is too late to protest. Mr A or Mr B, the broadcasting official, may be and indeed is a cypher, but his tastes will gradually sway millions. They will not of course do so in one broadcast programme or even a dozen, but if (and this is difficult) the thousand odd programmes produced by a man or woman over, say,

two years, could be examined, the drift of that producer's tastes and belief and influence would become evident. This, though obvious, is an important point, because all the careful regulations and safeguards are defeated by it. Whatever rules you may make, in the last resort public opinion will be formed by the men who actually produce programmes. The men who sit at the top, the ageing generals, the chairmen of gas boards, the ineffective professors, the uninspired journalists (Heavens! what strange people have been put in charge of the BBC!) know almost nothing about what is going on under their noses: they cannot – for who on earth can follow the details of sixty or seventy daily hours of programmes? And here I speak from personal experience, because when later I had my own broadcasting organisation in India, I madly tried to follow all programmes, only to find that it was quite impossible. The men who make the programmes (generally underpaid) sway the crowd: the administrators and authorities (usually overpaid) do not.

In the early days at Savoy Hill, we had one aim and one aim only – to find Voices to fill the Hours. If they were distinguished Voices, saying what we thought should be said, so much the better: but if not, programmes had to be invented to support poor voices. The first objective was to avoid silence. And this was not, at first, as easy as it sounds. We had no financial carrots to dangle, and many distinguished people fought shy of risking their reputation on the unfamiliar microphone. Fortunately there were some who did not. I remember best the trinity of E. M. Forster, Desmond MacCarthy and H. G. Wells, who all gave us freely of their time and wise counsels, and would sit round our gas fires at Savoy Hill, talking of the problems and possibilities of broadcasting. Desmond was, of course, a superb broadcaster: the only difficulty with him was to keep him to his script, for he would easily wander, in the Irish way, into a flood of reminiscence. E. M. Forster did not, as a speaker, quite reach the standard of his beautiful prose, but he was a wise and sympathetic counsellor. H.G. was a hopeless speaker with his squeaky voice (we built a special non-echo studio for him, but to no avail) but he was wise, even if, while always preening himself with women, he tended to be offensively rude to men and especially young men. At a slightly further remove, and in very different ways, were Arnold Bennett, Walter Elliott, and Hugh Walpole. A.B. could not broadcast on account of his stammer, but had a childish enthusiasm for all things new, and helped us enormously in dis-

covering talent. Walter Elliott, then tipped as a certainty as future Prime Minister, was a tower of strength in things political. And Hugh was a Niagara of verbosity and as harmless as water. Whenever a speaker failed, it was ten to one that a telephone call would produce Hugh, ready to speak without a manuscript, and to say nothing controversial, for exactly a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes or whatever time was needed. These six were great props. And then, of course, there were the 'established' popular broadcasters whose number steadily grew. It would be invidious, as they say, to list too many names here: it seems to me that Vernon Bartlett on international affairs and Ernest Newman on music criticism, were the first two, closely followed by Walford Davies, who was the best broadcaster I ever knew. He was that partly because he was by nature a stunningly gifted teacher and exponent, and partly because – a very rare gift – he was entirely unaffected by the microphone and the whole paraphernalia of broadcasting. Anyone who watched his antics in a studio – dropping music on the floor, blowing his nose, rubbing his spectacles, or throwing an odd remark to someone in the room – might have thought he was putting on an act: in fact he was simply his natural self, and a very engaging self it was. Nobody in all BBC history has succeeded in transmitting as he did a love of and enthusiasm for music. Ernest Newman was a law unto himself, refusing always to submit any manuscript or even to have one, but invariably producing beautiful talks.

I shared an office with Lance Sieveking. Lance lived somewhere among the rolling clouds of his vivid and sometimes erratic imagination, and occasionally from these clouds there fell a shower of brilliant ideas. His impact on broadcasting, though it cannot be measured by any statistical standards, was considerable. He was in the forefront of all experiments and afraid of nothing. He was a stimulant. It is always dangerous to say that any one person is or was responsible for an innovation, but it seems to me that it was Lance who fathered the first experiment in Baird's television – right back in 1930 at Savoy Hill – which took the form of a play, *The Man with a Flower in his Mouth*. It was jagged and hazy, but it gave us, even then, an idea of what television was bound to be. And with his play *Kaleidoscope* – at about the same time – he started the use of multiple studios with a 'panel' to control and 'mix' them. As a stable companion he was unpredictable and sometimes irritating. He would arrive (late) in the morning, and bending over his table towards me,

would say something like this: 'Have you *ever*, my dear Lionel, have you *ever* walked down a long *long* passage, with a mirror, a *huge great* mirror, at the end of it, and walked slowly slowly *slowly* until you got up to that *huge great* mirror, and looked into it, and seen . . .' and here his voice rose to a shout, 'NOTHING!!!!' And I would say, 'Oh really, Lance at this time of the morning, do for God's sake shut up!' And Sheila Wynn-Williams, our admirable and charming secretary, would giggle in the background. It was Lance who invented and had printed and framed a notice which stood beside the microphone: 'If you *sneeze* or *rustle papers*, you will DEAFEN THOUSANDS!!!!' With some difficulty I got these notices removed, as they caused great alarm and despondency among talkers. All the same, they remain an indication of the kind of fright which the microphone produced at that time – and not without reason: on one occasion a policeman who was broadcasting for me about his duties, and whom I had carefully rehearsed, had a last minute idea (which he did not communicate to me) that it would be fun to blow his whistle: he did so, and the whole BBC went off the air for several hours.

Every day and in every way, the organisation of broadcasting went ahead, and nobody could quite keep track of it. At first Hilda Matheson was the undisputed arbiter of the spoken word, and we were her disciples: but gradually other arbiters began to emerge – Derek MacCulloch, with his immensely successful Children's Hour, Mary Somerville with her programmes for Schools, Stobart with a very thin end of the wedge known as 'Adult Education', Henty with News, and, last but not at all least, the growing number of talks and commentaries on Sport – all these threatened the powers of a single 'Talks Director'. Very gradually, though it took a long time to come to a head, a squabble developed among these interests. But for most of the time at Savoy Hill no squabbles arose: there was too much to do. It was, for instance, difficult at first to decide how *long* any 'talk' should be: nowadays the fifteen minute period has been accepted as basic, but at that time we had little idea whether listeners would accept five or fifteen or thirty or sixty minutes. Eric Maschwitz, a man of sparkling ideas, threw quite a spanner into our works by inventing the highly popular 'In Town Tonight', in which talks were cut to a drastic two minutes each: and it did seem that perhaps that was enough for most speakers. On the other hand, the 'National Lecture' (what a name!) was invented for very distinguished people and lasted an hour: occasionally,

as in the case of Dr Glover with his 'Challenge of the Greek' it could be arresting: but usually it was a highbrow flop. Or, at least, so it seemed to us.

In this backward glance it is worth considering for a moment our own ideas about the future. Although broadcasting was empiric and faltering, we had some fairly clear notions about its ultimate development. Television, we knew, was bound to come: we also thought (and it is still a thought, because the requisite cheap sets cannot yet be manufactured) that microwaves were likely to give us thirty or forty separate programmes, and we had definite plans for (a) a continual news programme always on the air, always available, always being added to by the latest events; (b) a programme of light music and waltzes, without the intervention of any announcer (a great number of people wanted this 'background noise'); (c) a programme of continuous readings from the classics, always demanded by hospital patients; and so on and so forth. We also of course thought in terms of a 'Third' programme, essentially highbrow. Reith however was very much against any such specialization, and I think now that he was right. He invented what was known as the 'Phi' system: roughly speaking, this meant that certain programmes of value – a concert by Toscanini, a talk by Einstein, a starred production of Shakespeare – were made obligatory for the whole BBC network: other programmes of less importance but still of some moment could be queried by regional stations, which would have to suggest an alternative, and that alternative might or might not be accepted by London: a third category of programmes could be accepted or rejected by stations as they wished. Reith's argument (I trust that I have understood it) was that by this system listeners would automatically hear the best things and grow to like them: if you had a special programme for every taste you would merely be preaching to the converted, and get no further. That is a point of view which may be debated: I am inclined to think that the Third Programme, as it is today, is something which belongs to the private gramophone and the university lecture room, and not to broadcasting. Broadcasting should continually enlarge the listener's horizon, and if it does not do so it falls into a rut of routine: but it must never jump too far. I am aware, of course, that such arguments will be out-dated by commercial television and sound: sound and vision, spurred by advertisers, will, like the newspapers, follow popular taste: but do not ask me to believe that that is the best solution. The real degradation of the

BBC started with the invention of the hellish department which is called 'Listener Research'. That Abominable Statistic is supposed to show 'what listeners *like*' - and, of course, what they like is the red-nosed comedian and the Wurlitzer Organ. But anyone who has studied the letters received by the BBC knows that (a) only Abominable people ever write to it, and (b) hardly a single letter is a valid criticism. Hilda Matheson and I always wanted (and I am sorry that we never had the courage to do it) to put a speaker on the air saying tomato-tomato-tomato for a quarter of an hour: we were convinced that we should get letters of praise. (And my later experience at the Ministry of Food showed just how daft English letter-writers can be.) For the broadcasting official there can be one rule only - to do what he believes to be good and to spare no trouble in the doing of it. Once he begins to follow what is supposed to be popular taste, he is on the road to stagnation.

It is time that I mentioned two other people who, in their different ways, contributed a great deal to broadcasting in those early days. One was Stephen King-Hall: an example of a man who made himself into a broadcaster. I 'discovered' him because Oliver Baldwin took me to see him, saying that it was a shame that anyone so talented should be unemployed and nearly starving. I thought he had a lively mind, and invited him to try his voice at Savoy Hill. He asked me what he should talk about. I said that it didn't matter: anything that interested him. He decided to talk about the Mediterranean. He produced a quite good talk, which I did not think would set the Thames on fire. But, when he had finished and walked rather disconsolately away - that happened to many speakers, who felt that the lack of applause at the end of a talk was somehow discouraging - he got on to a bus in the Strand. Behind him were two men, and one said to the other, 'D'you know, I just heard a fellow on the wireless talking about the Mediterranean. It got me. Damned good he was I shall go there for my next holiday.' This conversation produced in Steve (so he has told me since) a sort of conversion of St Paul: he suddenly saw the possibilities of broadcasting, and set himself to work at it. And he worked with concentration and care. He learnt just what to do with his voice, and he kept a card index of every fan letter, and sent everyone a card at Christmas. Thus he built up an enormous popularity which probably counted for much when, later, he published his books and his News Letter and stood for Parliament. The other - a very

different character – was a Civil Servant called Lambert, who told stories under the pseudonym of A. J. Alan. His was a natural gift, and I have never known anyone quite like him. His stories began nowhere and ended nowhere, but he had an authentic Sheherazade gift, and could hold you enthralled. He was a pernickety broadcaster, never appearing more than four times a year, refusing all interviews and photographs and publicity, not submitting any manuscript beforehand, and vetoing all printed or written copies of his tales. Recently a member of the Third Programme told me that she had heard ‘recordings of A. J. Alan’ and thought them ‘poor’. I was surprised, because I find it difficult to believe that he ever permitted a recording: it may be so. At any rate, he was in a class by himself.

We worked very hard. By this I mean (as far as I am able to mean anything) that at the end of three years I had a nervous breakdown of shattering magnitude through overstrain: a breakdown which left me with persistent insomnia for the rest of my life. ‘Work’ is one of the most unsatisfactory words in the English language. Like ‘love’ it covers too many different things. There is manual labour, digging, heaving, lifting: there is rushing-about labour, errand-boys, commercial travellers, pilots, engine drivers: there is standing labour, shop assistants, waiters, bus conductors: there is skilled labour, surgeons, doctors, scientists: there is brain labour, accountants, civil servants, writers: there is the undoubted labour of a socially climbing hostess, or, come to that, of a prostitute: and so many more. What on earth is ‘work’? All that you can say is that it is activity. Certainly we were active. To gather enough people – always new and more people – for the microphone meant a constant alertness: the reading (or at least skimming) of every new book, the seeing of every new play and film, the attendance at every party to which one was asked, the journeys around England, to points where one thing or another created interest – slums, unemployment, pageants, new factories, a murder trial, a scandal, anything and everything: but above all an ear constantly cocked, at parties, in buses or tubes, at exhibitions, in shops, in the street and on the farm, for the Promising Voice. Never were there enough (and never are there now) Promising Voices. Many people would think that our ‘work’ was not work at all, but a constant round of pleasure. But we could never forget it: every moment of experience could be grist to the microphone. And then, when a voice or a personality was ‘captured’, there was the business of audition (no, I am so sorry, your

voice doesn't go on the microphone), and rehearsal (please do it just once more), and support for the actual broadcast (don't worry, just talk naturally . . . thank you so much, it was SPLENDID. Let me get you a taxi). And demand grew with the growth of broadcasting: special programmes of every kind for Tom, Dick and Harry, not only throughout the day but throughout the night too. There seemed no end to it.

From a snob point of view, we were enviable. At first I approached celebrities with caution, usually through some mutual friend; but as broadcasting developed it became possible, and even a part of 'work', to write to every celebrity who lived in or visited England, suggesting a broadcast: and the offer was rarely refused. Thus we were – if only as flunkys – in a position to meet anyone and everyone. It seemed, at first, intensely exciting to do this. It was only after experience that one learned, with grey and grisly disillusionment, that the Great Ones of the World were indistinguishable from ordinary people, and indeed were very often more captious and touchy than the average man. Naturally there were glowing exceptions, but on the whole one became aware that the chief advantage of meeting 'distinguished people' was to fill (if one so desired) a book of autographs. I was seldom able to make friends of the Great. Probably I was too unimportant and boring for them; possibly I did not often want to. In the process of meeting half-a-dozen celebrities every day, one became conscious of the classes into which they fell. Men and women. Women were (and are) almost never good broadcasters. I don't know why this should be, but it is a fact. You can reel off lists of men who have been, or are, stars of the microphone: but you will have a job to find any women who equal them (I refer here only to Talks). And that, certainly, was never our fault. I am sure that no famous woman was ever neglected by us. Lady Rhondda, that champion of feminism, once wrote of me in *Time and Tide* (after a luncheon tussle with her and H. G. Wells at the Ivy) that I was a 'highly-cultured hop-pole' – a description which has always delighted me. But the Lady Rhondas of this world can say what they like – no woman yet has ever been a real star of radio. It is a strange fact. Then there were the different worlds of literature, science, music, travel, the theatre, the films, industry, politics, law, medicine, engineering, painting (never a subject for sound radio), gardening, architecture, archaeology, and so on and so forth *ad infinitum*. Gradually, as these various worlds moved through the studios, one came to

recognize the broad characteristics of each. Actors and journalists were the two groups with which it was easiest to deal, because both actors and journalists realized as a matter of course that they were giving a performance and earning a fee, and both were ready to co-operate in doing the job well. Writers were more tricky: unpunctual, arrogant, and easily offended, they resented all criticism, and endeavoured to create an impression that they were doing us honour by deigning to come to the microphone at all. Scientists, engineers, mathematicians and all technicians, including civil servants were, though polite and conscientious, nearly always dull when it came to the spoken word, and the business of trying to persuade them to use simple English was long and tiresome. Of all groups, politicians were by far the worst; not only were they convinced that they knew about public speaking much better than we did, but they also translated our efforts as attacks on their party politics, and we were always set down as Reds or Reactionaries. I remember that I used to funk the rehearsal of every political talk, and wish the "speakers at the bottom of the deep blue sea. I can only recollect one exception to this rule, and that was Megan Lloyd George, who was not only a naturally good broadcaster, but also a person of great charm and gaiety, with whom it was always delightful to work. Dazzling exceptions cropped up, of course, in every group: men like Bernard Shaw and Sir James Jeans (to take two examples at random) took to the microphone as ducks to water, and their visits were holidays for us.

It may be asked how far a producer can assist a speaker to be successful at the microphone, and this is a debatable point which deserves a careful reply. We know from the theatre that good producers are scarce, and that the gift of persuading a performer to modify voice and movement is rare. We also know that you cannot make a good speaker out of a bad one, and that the microphone has an odd way of flattering some personalities and extinguishing others. (Lloyd George, for example, in spite of all our efforts, was never able to broadcast successfully: deprived of a live audience, he went flat.) Therefore there are two imponderables: the natural gifts of a speaker, and the natural gifts of a producer. The broadcasting official who listens to voices every day and almost all day must, if he is not a complete fool at the game, gain a sort of sixth sense about voices which are (a) naturally suited to the microphone (b) capable of improvement, and (c) hopeless; (a) will look after itself and (c) must be tact-

fully thrown out. But (b) is his problem. He can suggest, sometimes with great effect, the raising or lowering of the voice register: he can make changes in pace and pauses and emphasis: and in the last resort (though I was and remain violently opposed to this) he can 're-write' the talk in simpler or more conversational language. Whatever he does (and here we are far from theatrical practice) he must be extremely careful not to destroy the essential personality of the speaker. Ten rehearsals *may* produce only a mediocre talk: but sometimes they may work miracles. You never can tell. Moreover, you may find, to your astonishment, that a voice which sounded splendid on a dais or in a room develops on the microphone some strange and hideous accent or intonation. It boils down to this – that the gifted, sympathetic and imaginative producer *can* very often help the nervous or inexperienced speaker *if the speaker is willing*: and this is a necessary part of all broadcasting because there are never enough gifted speakers to fill the programmes. Apart from this, the broadcasting official can make things easier for speakers and writers by inventing frameworks. In the early days of broadcasting, we found it extremely difficult to obtain 'spontaneous' debates (now made much simpler by the then impossible process of recording), and, to meet this difficulty, we invented a series called 'Conversations in the Train'. It was a simple sort of idea – train noises under a discussion of live issues. Writers and speakers were tickled by it and debates became better: moreover I was able to do without censorship because, with gramophone records of train noises running throughout the discussions, I could always drown a risky sentence under a whistle or the roar of a tunnel. In such ways – and there are always hundreds of them – speakers and writers may be helped by an imaginative staff.

Looking back, it all seems faintly ridiculous. Perhaps in retrospect all bureaucratic effort seems that. There is no sense of achievement. You cannot say, I painted that picture, I wrote that symphony, I designed that house. If you are honest with yourself, it is obvious that the wheels went grinding on and would have done so, as well or better, without you. Why did we cudgel our brains in all our waking hours for new ideas, why did we rush like panting terriers after new voices, new writers, new methods of presentation, why did we spend long hours of overtime in the studios, trying out new permutations and combinations of sound? What did it all amount to? Today, as sound broadcasting sinks into its grave with the silent films and the

blunderbuss, what is the result of all our efforts? Mrs Dale's Diary and the red-nosed comedian at one end, the gabble of an Isaiah Berlin and the scrapings of a Stravinsky at the other. The splendid conquest of the ether has turned into a dull drug, a lullaby for foggy minds. What did we hope for? I think we hoped for a clear voice which would cut through hypocrisy and half-truth. Not any longer the quiet voiced elders, bequeathing merely a receipt for deceit. Something more decisive: a Voice of God, perhaps. One shouldn't complain, I daresay: after all, Christianity is in much the same boat, and that had Jesus Christ to inspire it. We made the mistake of thinking of radio as a new religion, when it was merely a new channel for the same water. And maybe the use of the plural pronoun is wrong: most people in the BBC were probably content to earn their salaries and produce popular entertainment. I hoped, in a rather vague way, for something better: and so did Hilda Matheson.

Hilda drew my admiration, respect, and affection almost instantly. I had at first thought that it would be strange, perhaps impossible, to work under a woman, but that feeling soon faded. Hilda was never preoccupied by power, never lectured, never laid down the law: she ran her department on a loose rein, encouraging, helping, sympathising, and yet keeping herself firmly in the saddle. She was in the saddle because she was usually right. She was not supremely intelligent or supremely beautiful or supremely chic or supremely anything: she was just one of those people who are made of pure gold all the way through. You could not imagine Hilda panicking about anything, or failing to meet any situation with composure and charm. She had the rare gift of making all life seem an adventure, and she was always the best of good company, with a blessed sense of the ridiculous. I grew devoted to her, and my years at Savoy Hill were perhaps glamourized by this devotion. What happened later was all the more appalling to me.

Placed as I was, with the arc-lamps surrounding celebrities throwing a reflected light on me, I stumbled to new social heights of snobbery and fatuity. My stepmother, seeing that I was established in London, and fairly respectable for a change, conceived the idea that it would be a good plan for us to share a house, to which she could from time to time escape from my father. It was, as we might both have known, a quite horrible idea. Her friends were drawn from the huntin' shootin' and bridge-playin' set, and bored the pants off me. She thought that

my theatrical and literary lions were beyond the pale. However, since I, with my total £700 a year, wasn't rich enough to entertain as I wanted to do, and she, with a great deal of money, wanted someone to run a house in London for her, it seemed a good notion at first. A long low house in Wilton Street, admirably suited to party-giving, was bought and furnished: in its panelled hall I gathered all the famous people I could lay my hands on, and they came because broadcasting was beginning to look like a paying proposition. The doings at Wilton Street were duly reported and photographed by *The Tatler*, and I was 'in the swim'. My stepmother had a knack of arriving in the middle of a raffish assembly, and I erupted with theatrical whirlwinds into her most pompous bridge-parties. But it did not much matter: I was too busy for niceties of class. I was pleased with my job, with London, and with, above all, myself.

Slowly this picture began to change. As with all such changes, it is difficult to put a finger on the exact causes. The BBC was growing rapidly, and, as in all cases of growth, became less flexible in the process. The first major change was the introduction of 'administrative officers' to control our budgets. In the early days we – that is to say, the programme producers – could allot fees as we thought fit: now we began to have worthy people of a civil service type who decided whether Priestley or Edgar Wallace or T. S. Eliot was worth two guineas or ten. Or indeed whether we could afford them at all. This was an almighty mistake: domination by the mediocre had begun. Worse than that, squabbles began: the chasm yawned ever wider between bold experiment and cautious compromise. Also the BBC, with its growing influence, was coming under fire from all sides for suspected favouritism of one kind or another: too Tory, too Labour, too Red, too Reactionary, too many symphony concerts or too few, too many talks or not enough, nepotism on the staff, bad coverage: any old stick would do to beat this huge Aunt Sally. At the same time, since the BBC was now obviously a bandwagon, there were plenty of people trying to climb on to it or up it. Rifts developed and grew among the staff: pioneering days were over.

In the course of collecting voices, I had, inevitably, approached many people who in those days were labelled 'progressive'. (I need hardly add that now, thirty years later, they are all staunch old diehards, which is the natural fate of progressives.) As a result of this, Hilda and I attended a good many parties, in

London and in country houses, where intellectuals – to use that pompous word – were gathered together. Gentlemen in the Athenaeum Club were soon whispering to Reith that he was being ‘run by a Gang of Reds’. Reith began to turn an enquiring eye upon the Talks department, and sent sharp little notes to Hilda suggesting that so-and-so held eccentric or subversive or atheistic or anarchistic views and was not a suitable person for the microphone. Hilda, jealous of her friends, retorted no less sharply, and the battle was on. Reith soon reached a point of saying that so-and-so *was not* to broadcast: Hilda implied that he didn’t have enough culture to know what he was talking about. I became a highly uncomfortable buffer state, trying at one moment to persuade Reith that Hilda was valuable to the BBC, and at another trying to stop Hilda from writing offensive memoranda. It was all to no purpose: Hilda was forced into resignation, and left the BBC for ever.

At this point I must try to keep Reith in sharp focus. He became and has remained one of my most valued friends, and my admiration and affection for him are immense. His saga as first head of the BBC must be one of the strangest tricks that Destiny ever played on a man. From the not very important managing director of a wireless company he rose in a few short years to be a kind of Arbiter of Religion, Morals and Taste. It would have been a severe trial for the most brilliant saint or seer. Reith rose magnificently to his opportunities, and if it can be said that any one man ‘created’ the BBC, he was certainly that man. His stamp still remains on it, and nobody since has greatly altered it. Undoubtedly he gave it dignity, integrity and respect. But no man can be expert in everything, and no man is entirely without prejudices. Reith had his limitations. His presbyterian cast of mind is not wholly at ease in the artistic world. One of his favourite remarks was that ‘broadcasting should be in the van, but only just in the van’. This meant roughly, to use a painting simile, that you might dare to go from the National Gallery to the Tate, but not so far as the London Group. I don’t know that he was wrong: listeners were easily huffed by anything too startling. But his influence did tend to hold the BBC back from all things provocative, or even bold. Moreover – and this was perhaps his worst fault – like most men in power, he did not take kindly to criticism, and was apt to surround himself with yes-men. Many years later, when I raised this point with him, he said quite frankly, ‘Yes, if you have a man like me and get rid of him,

there is a case for getting rid of all his staff at the same time.' Certainly I felt, when after his departure I returned temporarily to the BBC in 1940, that a vivifying influence had been lost, and that, behind the Director-General's door there was no longer any personality at all. He was perfectly within his rights in ousting Hilda Matheson in 1929, but in my view (which, as you will shortly see, was a partial one) he made a mistake which has since affected the whole development of the spoken word on the microphone.

Hilda's downfall caused a whole lot of new forces to come into play. Chief among the leading personalities were Maisie Somerville, the Director of Schools Programmes, and Charles Siepmann, who was butting his way upwards from Adult Education. All this took me somewhat unawares: I could not really believe that Hilda would go, and it did not then occur to me that I might succeed her. I don't think that I even wanted it. But between not wanting it and having Charles jumped up over my head, there was a vast difference. And indeed this was the first formidable row in the BBC. A stink of intrigue went up, and people felt uncomfortable about their own jobs. Nine of us, in the Talks Department, decided that we would resign in a body. Hilda, however, deplored any such action on our part, and took us to Walter Elliott's house, where he harangued us, and pointed out that we should be forgotten in a week and would succeed only in harming the BBC. So our gesture was dropped. But my instinct shouted very loud and clear, it came and shouted in my ear, that my days in broadcasting were done, and that I should cut adrift without more ado. And this instinct was neither (as I now see) wrong, nor was it entirely or even preponderantly a matter of selfishness or sour grape. There were at least five valid reasons for me to leave the BBC. One was that I believed and still believe that a mass form of entertainment such as the BBC should never be served by a permanent and pensionable staff. If you want variety – and you do – you must vary your staff. The most brilliantly original thinker will not stand up to a daily bleeding of his originality: he must become stale. Another very valid reason was that my loyalty to broadcasting, and my pleasure in it, were conditioned by my admiration for Hilda, and had nothing whatever to do with the kind of cautious civil service which the BBC was becoming. A third was that promotion in the BBC led to desk work, and desk work was exactly what I did not want: I wanted to live in the studios and produce programmes.

But the higher you and your salary rose in the BBC – and this, this damnable fact, is true today – the less you had to do with studios or programmes. (I wish that the BBC charter made it compulsory for all BBC 'directors', from the Director-General down, to produce at least one programme a month under their own name; we should soon see how much these highly-paid gentlemen know about broadcasting.) A fourth and very valid reason was that, however much I hated the idea of becoming a desk-bound Director, I hated even more the pressure that would turn me into a Director-frustrated impresario. And, say what you like, that problem is always with us: put the administrator above the creator, and you make a hell. And a fifth reason was that I was temperamentally unsuited to be an ageing, routine-bound member of a huge timid Corporation. But, alack and alas, I had tasted the fleshpots and was ready to sell my soul.

Charles Siepmann quickly made it clear that he was prepared to pay for my soul. He took me to dine at the Athenaeum – naturally he belonged to that club – and assumed his saintly air. He spread the butter of flattery thick, told me what a fine fellow I was, and how great was my contribution to broadcasting, waved his hands in a gesture of hopelessness, and swore that if I put my intention of resignation into effect, the standard of programmes would fall, and his own reputation would suffer. There was a germ of truth in this. Fortuitously I was the one person in the Talks Department at that moment who on the one hand had a quirk of imagination and on the other a vast knowledge of the voices and pens necessary for programmes. That does not mean that I was in any way exceptional: hundreds of people like me could have been found: it just happened that the BBC had not found them just then. Had I resigned, the programmes would certainly have suffered for six months or so, because the machinery would have been temporarily lost. And Charles was aware that if they suffered at the beginning of his reign, his reputation would be harmed. So he produced (just like any international gathering) a Treaty of Compromise. He would divide the Department into three – News, Adult Education, and General Talks, and over the last I should have full authority. I did not like it, but I liked even less a return to the days of my unemployment, and I doubted if I was fit for any other job. I said weakly that I would try it for a year: and I should have been astonished had I known that the trial would last for five. Now, as I look back. I know that I made a terrible mistake.

The additional work and anxieties caused by the gradual disintegration of Hilda, and the storms which followed, now sent me into a nervous breakdown of madhouse proportions: and this was followed by shingles of the fifth nerve, which, as anyone who has had it knows, is a trying disease. When I emerged, somewhat shaken, Anthony Asquith invited me to ask the BBC for a month's leave, and to go with him to Malta for the filming of the Gallipoli sequences of E. T. Raymond's *Tell England*. The Company wanted my advice on the choice and arrangement of the 'Gallipoli' beaches, and would be glad to pay my expenses, though, since I was a member of the BBC, I could not technically be 'employed'. I was devoted to Puffin Asquith, who is one of the most charming people on earth, and I jumped at the offer. So I travelled down through Italy and Sicily, and spent one of the most diverting months of my life in Malta. The film was financially underwritten by an industrialist called (I think) Little, whose son had been killed in Gallipoli: and was looked upon with favour by Authority, which meant that we had at our disposal the British Mediterranean Fleet and some 5,000 soldiers. The Company, which was headed by the endearing Bruce Woolf, treated me with great kindness. The whole month was punctuated by One Ridiculous Incident After Another: ORIAA. Puffin and I started with the whale of a gaffe, going to make a formal call on the Admiral in the flagship, and omitting to realize that it was the King's birthday. We arrived on the stroke of noon, when the ship was dressed overall (if that is the right term) and the guns were about to be fired. Our Laurel and Hardy appearance at the gangway created consternation, and we were hurried below. The Brock's bombs which we carried everywhere, to simulate the explosions of shells, proved a great deal more deadly than anyone had supposed, and were always exploding in the wrong places. On one occasion someone dropped a cigarette-butt into a case of twenty, and I, who was down on the beach, saw Puffin vanish in an atomic cloud of black smoke. Puff, though an admirable director, had an Oxford voice which tickled the licentious soldiery: when he said, through the megaphone, 'Would you *mind* moving a *little* further to the right?' (they were wading in the shallows, rehearsing 'the attack') the words were taken up along the shore 'Would you *maind*, mai deah fellah, would yer *maind*?' But the soldiery objected very violently to the idea that they should drown in the shallows among the barbed wire, taking synthetic blood into their mouths and letting it out into the

water: that was too near the knuckle. Surprisingly, the film gradually built itself up in a vivid way. There came a stupendous moment when Puffin and I, in a little boat in the middle of Ghain Tafeia Bay, were able, by wireless, to direct the British Fleet. '*Revenge*, a mile nearer, if you please: *Barham*, a mile back.' Then came the scenes of the landing, with the boats from the ships dividing on either side of our tug, and rowing away towards the land, where the Brock's bombs were already bursting with great effect. Oddly enough, it was very moving: I could have cried. However bad or good the film eventually was, that reproduction of the Gallipoli landings had great validity. I had bought myself a full-size Bell & Howell cine camera, and with this I clicked away merrily until I had exhausted ten reels. When we left Malta, the Company's film was sent (by some arrangement with the Customs) by sea, but I fastened my ten reels about my body with tapes and said nothing to anyone. There was a horrid moment when the Customs man at Dover recognized Puffin, and, after asking him how the filming had gone, handed us a list of forbidden goods: and Puff passed it to me, saying, 'Have we got any of these, Lionel?' I put on my best poker face, and clanked away towards the gates. Roddy, the camera man, who was in front of me, was stopped and prodded by the man on duty, and I broke into a cold sweat. But I was untouched: and when the train drew out of Dover, I proudly exhibited my reels. Everybody was furious: it was pointed out that I could have wrecked the film. I took my film to Grierson, a good friend of mine and then looked on as a great expert, and asked him to 'cut' it, which he did so badly that I had another copy made and cut it myself. It came out as a beautiful and amusing 'trailer'. The staff at Welwyn were greatly impressed, and Bruce Woolf remarked, 'If it all comes out like this, we've got a winner!' Later, the whole film was run through in the presence of Mr Little, and I thought it first-rate. Mr Little did not, and in an hour made alterations which wrecked it. I protested to Puff against this vandalism, but Puff, polite as ever, shook his head and said that without Mr Little it would never have been made. So it was a flop.

Returned to London, I found that my stepmother, tired of the Wilton Street experiment, had let the house without informing me. That did not matter, because I was sick of London life and parties. I decided that I would take a cottage in the country, and see how commuting suited me. I was lucky in finding in-

stantly not only a dream cottage at Merstham, but also a dream housekeeper in Rose Edgington. This darling woman cooked for me superlatively, kept my house spotless, and looked after me and my guests like a mother, for five years. The mad nonsense started by socialists, their dear delusion about the degradation of domestic drudgery, is a fake and a sham. Rose was happy with me, and I was happy with Rose. Why in God's name should you admit that one man is a mechanic, or a politician, or a painter, or a musician, or an accountant, and in the same breath say that no one is a cook or a housemaid or a butler?

Delighted by Merstham and Rose, I now bought a tumbledown old house at Windlesham. It had been inhabited by an eccentric old bachelor who had let it go to rack and ruin. It had five acres of land, mostly bog into which you sank ankle-deep, through which ran a purling stream. The house was two old cottages knocked into one, with one primitive bathroom, two sitting-rooms, and five bedrooms. Great elms grew alongside it and made it dark and damp. But it had promise and I bought it for £800. At this point my father played a trick on me. Or did he? To this day I don't know whether it was a trick, or whether he was mean, or whether he thought he would give me a salutary lesson in economics. Since I had no capital, and wasn't likely to have it, I asked him (after taking some time to screw my courage to the sticking-point) whether he would give me an advance for the house, which I would repay. He replied that if I wanted capital, he would do a business deal with me. He would commute my allowance of £300 per annum, and give me £6,000 in lieu of it. I was delighted: £6,000 seemed to me a fortune. I thanked him effusively. He then wrote to his solicitors and instructed them to hand over to me six thousand pounds of deferred railway shares. When I asked the solicitors for the £800 to pay for the house, they looked down their noses and said that I had better arrange for a mortgage. I asked why, if I had six thousand pounds. With immense difficulty it was explained to my addled brain – which had never dealt with shares – that deferred railways were standing at about forty, and that this meant that they were worth not six thousand but two thousand five hundred. Since they 'might' recover, it was inadvisable to sell. I hadn't a clue about this. I rang up everyone I knew in the City. Some said, 'Hang on to them': others said, 'Get rid of them'. I vacillated: and every day they went down. When they reached two thousand pounds I sold them. And I was right because they never

recovered. My father got out of it nicely: I lost £300 a year, and gained two thousand. This experience cured me for ever of any desire to experiment with stocks and shares. I paid for the house, and had just enough money over to buy a modest amount of furniture, to paint the rooms myself, and to spend some money on draining the bog. Luckily for me, the summers of the early thirties were magnificent, and my work paid off. The bog became an enchanting garden, and the house, when a few trees had been felled and some coats of whitewash applied, a gay little abode. Five years later, when I went to India, I sold it for five thousand guineas, and thus I very nearly (though not quite) got back on Father.

By the time that I returned to the BBC, I had begun to take a different view of my job, though I don't suppose that at that moment I was conscious of any great change. But in fact I was no longer a dedicated man with a crusade. For various reasons the gilt on the BBC gingerbread had worn a bit thin. I realized that we were going to get more and more cautious, and that things were going to be run not by inspired decisions but by slow committees. I also realized that although I could continue indefinitely as a programme man, I was unlikely to get promotion into the ranks of 'administrators'. Apart from that, I now had a house and a garden which focussed a lot of my interest, and I was no longer inclined to work overtime or worry myself unduly if programmes were bad. I knew that I knew enough to get away with my job as well as anyone else, and that seemed to suffice. In brief, I had taken that fatal step which most men take when they marry, and when a job, while essential, is only a way of paying for a home life. Mind you, I don't think that the BBC suffered from any inefficiency or laziness on my part: they got what they paid for, and probably what they wanted – a man who did his stuff reasonably well and was afraid of the sack. Isn't that what all employers want? But strictly speaking, I ought to have been sacked. I had grown a deadly hatred of the ingrowing BBC respectability and longed to upset it. I was an employee with a chip on my shoulder.

On two points only I was able to preserve a crusading spirit, and a feeling of magic. These were historic events, and poetry. I thought, and I still think, that sound radio was and is a fascinating medium for both, and that neither had or has been exploited as well as it might be. My excursion into history came about by chance. On the occasion of the marriage of the Duke of

Kent to Princess Marina, the BBC issued one of their especially stupid 'orders' – to the effect that no programme outside the actual broadcast of the ceremony was to deal with the marriage. Such orders always spurred me to disobedience. I put in two programmes, one called 'Epithalamion', and the other 'The Arrival'. I was fairly sure (and I was right) that nobody in the higher echelons of the BBC would know that 'Epithalamion' had anything to do with marriage, and I planned a super-reading of Spenser's poem with a backing of Elizabethan music. 'The Arrival' was to cover the wedding of Princess Alexandra of Denmark to the then Prince of Wales, which had some things in common with the Kent wedding. This programme exceeded all my expectations, and was perhaps the most successful programme I ever did for the BBC. I was helped in it by Kenneth Adam, who waded through a large part of the immense amount of contemporary papers which, to my surprise, were available. The result was that we could follow every detail, from the first visit of Queen Victoria to Denmark, and her remarks about Alexandra, on through the absurdly insincere speeches in Parliament, and so to the arrival of the yacht at Tilbury, and the journey to London by the new railroad, which went 'at the astonishing speed of eight miles an hour'. Then came the drive through London, enlivened by the collapse of most of the stands, built by dishonest contractors, and a perfect riot of drunkenness. And then came the arrival at Windsor, with Queen Victoria 'waiting with all my daughters in the long drawing-room till we heard the carriages approaching', and then the whole lovely service, with the original music and the comments of contemporary diary-writers, and so to the moment when the Queen walked away by herself to Frogmore. The programme was helped by a brilliant cast, and Kate Cutler as Victoria gave a great performance. But that was not the whole story. It just happened to be one of those rare programmes which, as soon as the handles of the panel controlling the studios began to turn, leapt to life. One saw the whole scene, and one was suddenly conscious of the immense possibilities of sound radio. Television would not have done it: it was a matter for the ear and the imagination.

Its success was undoubted. We had shoals of letters, and Reith called me down to his room and told me that he thought it one of the most spectacular programmes ever produced. If I could do that, he said, why did I not give up the idea of India (which had just then swum into my ken) and devote myself exclusively to

programmes of past events? I was a little shaken by this, and sketched out some ideas for other similar programmes on the South Sea Bubble, the fall of Charing Cross Station, the opening of the Crystal Palace, Disraeli's purchase of the Suez Canal shares, the death of the Prince Consort, and other such byways of history. But I was bitten with the Indian idea (as I shall later make clear), and nothing came of them.

My other crusade was less popular and more arduous. From the early days at Savoy Hill, we had been intrigued but defeated by the possibilities of verse-reading on the microphone. It seemed that not only the medium but also the listeners were ideally suited to it. No country in the world has equalled England in poetry, and although Englishmen may often laugh it off, there is a deep poetical strain in the English character. Here you had a medium which did away with the often embarrassing *presence* of the reader, and could perhaps reach back to epic days. We tried one thing and another: poets reading their own verse, groups of poems under a single theme or idea, anthologies (we actually published a book), competitions, and so on. Nothing quite came off. People, so far as we could make out, switched off as soon as a poetry programme was *announced*. I began to try a different method: no announcement at all, but a gentle introduction of good music, leading into a poem. Gradually I began to think that perhaps there could be a connection between a piece of music and a poem and a voice, just as there is a scientific connection (because they are all vibrations) between light, heat and sound. I embarked on a series under the generic title of Mosaic. In these programmes I endeavoured to take an idea – self-sacrifice, the country or the town, war, peace, travel, Christmas, government, what-have-you – and push poetry and music into that idea. I pushed ruthlessly, cutting poems and music as I fancied. Often I failed miserably: sometimes, for an ecstatic moment, the programme rushed to life. I was not popular and the programmes were not well received: but poets from W. B. Yeats to Robert Nichols were interested, and came to argue with me. I had not and have not the faintest doubt that I trembled on the edge of a discovery which could (and still can) make radio programmes of poetry thrilling: but I never quite captured the exact recipe. Each quarter-of-an-hour programme that I did cost me three months of evenings devoted to repetitions of music and poems: whatever people may have said against them (and they said a lot) they were the product of much work and thought. And I have the

impertinence to think today that, though they were far from perfect, the BBC has never since done anything that remotely approaches them.

By 1934 I was an old hand at the BBC in so far as there could be any 'old' hands in that new pursuit. I churned out programmes, interviewed speakers, made appointments, ran a subsection, entertained crowds of folk at Windlesham, dug my garden, and got into a thorough muddle with myself. I was sick of the whole business. What did I want? I did not know: but not this everlasting repetition of the same old chores. During my eight years of my first steady job, I had made – as was inevitable in that position – a great host of more or less distinguished acquaintances, and a few friends. It was a little sad, from a snobbish point of view, that distinction and friendship did not seem to go together. I should have liked to be an intimate of the Great, but I wasn't. I did however make three women friends who each had her own distinction – Margot Oxford, Sybil Colefax, and Marie Tempest. These three charmers, all so different, added so much affection, so much cosiness, so much confidence to my life that I miss them at every hour, even today. Different as they were, they had one thing in common: if you were once their friend, their loyalty was unshakeable and they never let you go. Margot had a devastating candour which earned her many enemies: once you got past it, and realized that it was no more than a childlike innocence which concealed no malice, she was the best and liveliest of friends. When I had my appendix out, she came to see me every day, bringing great tomes of her scrap-books (and they were quite something) to amuse me, and sparing no pains to raise my spirits. And, after all, I was small beer for her. Sybil Colefax was a not particularly intelligent lion-hunter, and made no bones about her social climbing. But, whether you were important or not, she never let you go once she had made you her friend. I spent many happy hours in the lovely Argyll House, as I also did in Bedford Square. Both these women were great hostesses, and the great hostess, who has a perfect intuition about mixing and dominating her parties, is not to be despised. Good conversation and good food in a happy atmosphere are not so easy to come by. Marie Tempest was, of course, in a different world. She was not only a great artist of the theatre, she was a great artist of life. I don't think that anyone I ever met justifies that description better. Her conversation, her movements, her clothes, her hair, her houses, her gardens, her food, her cars, the whole

smooth arrangement of her life, were managed with a quite extraordinary precision and intelligence. She was the most fastidious person I ever knew, and I think the most attractive. I ran to her with all my troubles, and never came away without a saner view. It was a pleasure to look at her, a pleasure to listen to her, a pleasure to be with her. I don't know where she sprang from, from the gutter perhaps, but she was the greatest lady I ever knew. I don't think I have ever missed – and continued to miss – any human being as much as I miss her. She decorated life.

Like any other young man in a large city, I fell in and out of love. The English language, normally so rich, is quaintly poor about this monosyllable. Mother-love, love of mother, asexual love of friends, love of a dog or a horse or a house, physical love lasting a week or several years, love of power, of humanity, of the arts, of God – all these infinite variations and many more go under one name. I don't believe that (in the Paolo and Francesca sense) I was ever truly in love: I was quite often in lust. I preferred my own sex to the opposite one: whether that was ineradicably born in me, whether it was the result of war, or whether (as sometimes happens) it arose from a fear of emotional entanglement, I don't know. I have a theory (which nobody is going to squash) that when a boy is surrounded in youth by older women whom he reveres, the idea of going to bed with a woman appears to him an act of sacrilege. However that may be, I found my experience of sex so painful and daunting that, in my early thirties, I decided that I must cut it resolutely out of my life. Plenty of people do that, and it isn't fearfully difficult. The only trouble is that absence of sex creates a vacuum which needs to be filled by some over-riding interest: and that I never quite found. Thus, I suspect, I assumed a mask of frigidity and indifference which made many people find me disconcerting and unsympathetic. In retrospect (*si vieillasse pouvait*) I am inclined to think that when, at the gates of heaven, I show up my nice paper of a Chaste Life, St Peter, far from awarding me full marks, will give me a zero and send me downstairs to get a bit more experience. Sex is a business into which, whatever silly laws are made, one should adventure boldly. I merely ran away.

When, in 1927, I had managed to squeeze myself past the shaggy eyebrows of Mr Reith, and become a member of the BBC, Eric Dunstan, the 'golden-voiced announcer' of his day, was just

leaving England to take charge of Indian broadcasting. I envied him in spite of the low value which we attached to broadcasting in those days. I envied him India; I envied him what I conceived to be the business of transmitting barbaric music on jewelled instruments to a population of Indian princes in the intervals of holding profound converse with sages of charm and infinite wisdom. In 1930 he was back, mortified, humiliated and enraged; and Indian broadcasting had gone bankrupt. This was a puzzle to me; and although I forgot about India in the breathless task of feeding the ever-hungrier microphone of Britain, it remained, in the back of my mind, a puzzle which I intended to solve. And if one's intentions are even moderately firm and consistent, they are often realized. Early in 1935 I heard, by chance, that junior members of the BBC were being asked if they would care to go to India. No such invitation had come to me, so I took myself downstairs to Mr Administrator Nicholls, whose signature appeared on those issued. Nicholls, looking startled by my irruption, said: 'You seem to be a ram caught in the thicket.'

'I haven't the remotest idea what you are talking about.'

'I mean,' he said, bald head flushing, 'well - you have a claim.'

'Claim?' I said indignantly. 'And why not? You are asked to send someone to organise broadcasting for a whole sub-continent, and you issue the invitation only to juniors.'

'Yes - I don't know why it didn't go to you.'

'I suppose most people here are too comfortable to think of going to India.'

'The pay and prospects aren't very attractive.'

'But the job might be?'

Nicholls shook his head. 'Well, I was born there. I wouldn't go. Funny country. Government of India's the most bureaucratic in the world. You mightn't like that.'

'Do you think,' I asked, 'someone else would do it better?'

'Well,' he said, 'there's Beadle.'

The first Great Man said: 'Your record's not very good, y'know, for this kind of job.'

I asked: 'Why not?'

'H'm - all over the place - sticking to nothing long -'

'But surely taking an interest in a good many things, perhaps even learning something about them - isn't that what you want for broadcasting?'

'Unstable -'

'After all, I've been here eight years.'

'Nobody's going to deny that you've inspired programmes. But organisation's another thing.'

I get mad when anyone says anything of this kind.

'Organisation,' I said, 'is nothing but an invention of mediocre people to prove that they can do something.'

'Quite. You always overstate a case. This job isn't going to be programme-building; it's going to be hard, systematic desk-work. See my desk? Is yours as tidy?'

'I don't have three secretaries. And how many worth-while people in the world's history had "tidy desks"?'

'You must remember that I'm assuming a responsibility in recommending you.'

'Certainly. Then send Beadle.'

'I wanted to talk about that.'

The Great Man got up. He was very tall: his chair was very high; the visitors' chairs were an abasement. There was almost no possible visitor above whom he couldn't tower. Nevertheless, the towering business, if somewhat babyish, was also in an odd way endearing. I always had an insane desire, during these interviews, to clamber on to my chair before speaking.

'Yerrs,' he said, adopting a well-known and caricatured attitude, and staring out of the window. 'Beadle, ye see, has a wife and family. The salary of two thousand pounds which they are offering won't be enough for him, although, mark you, it might be for you.'

'I'd go for two hundred.'

The Great Man turned his eyes away from the window, and fixed them upon me.

'Now doesn't it strike you that that's not playing the game - taking an unfair advantage, in fact? You say you'd go for two hundred simply because you have private means, whereas Beadle -'

'It's you who are unfair. Just because I always have, always do, and always shall, spend every penny I earn, all you people jump to the conclusion that I'm rolling in private means. You can look at my bankbook; you'll find zero or something damned near, and no securities.'

'Well, I confess you surprise me. If what you say is true, it surely doesn't argue well for your foresight and prudence. After all -'

'I ought to save money? I have never been able to see why. I

like so many things so much better than bank balances or stocks. I think they *are* better.'

'You are suggesting that it's a good thing, an admirable thing, to be a spendthrift?'

'Not at all. I happen to like my house and garden, and I like spending money on both to the utmost limit of what I earn.'

'And what's going to happen to all that if you go to India?'

'I haven't faced up to that yet. Anyway, it's not decided; and you don't seem very keen on the idea.'

'I never said that. It's my business to weigh things up.'

There was a pause, I found myself looking, as I always did in this room, at a large gilt-mounted globe which indicated not only twenty-four hour time but also the BBC's failure to impose it on the mildly-amused but unconvinced British populace. 'This is London calling. The time is now fourteen minutes past fourteen . . .' The corner of my eye took in the Great Man's boots on the hearthrug, and I knew that he was irritated. As always, I felt like a small boy in the headmaster's room, and this inferiority complex made me wish to say something exceptionally rude. I must pull myself together, I thought; after all, I want this job.

'What were you going to suggest about Beadle?'

'Yerrs. What do you yourself think of him?'

'Beadle? I scarcely know him. I believe he's thought to be a good administrator.'

'And isn't that what's wanted?'

We're off again, I thought.

'No. What's wanted is smashing drive, and a whip-up of enthusiasm in a country which has scarcely heard of broadcasting.'

'That's part of the job, I grant you. But isn't it just as important to build a good steady foundation?' The Great Man stared out of the window again. 'I often think you want two people for this job. Tchh! The Government of India should have been more generous -- much more generous. Yerrs. About Beadle. I was thinking that perhaps you would stand out for the salary that he requires.'

'How much does he require?'

'Well, we thought about three thousand. After all, he would be giving up very good prospects here --'

'And I shouldn't?'

'You gave me to understand that you didn't approve of sticking to anything for long.'

'Perhaps there's something in that. So I am to refuse anything less than three thousand?'

'We thought you might be willing to compete with Beadle on equal terms.'

'So I most certainly am,' I said, nettled. 'But I also happen to know that other outside candidates, including Eric Dunstan, have applied for this job. Is the BBC going to guarantee that they compete on equal terms?'

'And how did Dunstan know anything about it?'

'I told him.'

'Why in the world did you do a thing like that?'

'But I'm not afraid of competition! As a matter of fact, I wanted to find out something about the back history of broadcasting in India.'

The Great Man stalked to his chair, put on a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, and made a note with a gold pencil on a perfectly new block.

'Yerss. I see that this somewhat alters the situation. Very well. I shall write to the High Commissioner and ask him not to discuss salaries at all. Will you agree to that?'

'Certainly. What do I do if he does?'

'I presume that if I ask him not to, he will not. Eh? Anyway, I shall wait until I hear from him.'

Fifteen minutes past sixteen on the globe. I went out.

'We are summoned to the High Commissioner at 12.30,' said Beadle.

I found this irritating for several reasons. First, it was Beadle who had been informed, and then informed me; I felt that he had somehow got a start. Second, I did not know Beadle at all well - later I came to respect and like him immensely - and some mischievous person had told me that he thought it beneath his dignity even to compete with me; and this was quite a probable theory, because the contempt felt for 'programme people' by 'administrators', and vice versa, was immeasurable. Third, the idea of going together appalled me; I had visions of sitting on a bench with Beadle before the High Commissioner, who would see which of us was the better at answering general questions.

Uneasily, therefore, I accompanied Beadle into the very small waiting room at India House. Beadle was silent. I continued to think that he thought me an impertinent interloper, and remained silent also. There were some terrible trade journals on the

table, and no view from the window. We were thus constrained to rub our chins and gaze vacantly at the framed photographs which hung on the walls - pictures of a type with which I was soon to become too dreadfully familiar. 'State Dinner given at Gurkbeta by H.H. the Maharajah of Gurkbeta in honour of the visit of Their Excellencies', 'H.E. the Viceroy with the Nawab of Phootal after a day's shoot at Phootal', 'Lady Piles opens the new Beedabhoy Feedabhoy Hospital in Poona'. In Beadle's prolonged absence these pictures began to get on my mind. Beadle had been called first to the presence. It was a relief to know that we were not to be interviewed together, but why Beadle first? A, B, C, D, E, F - was it alphabetical or an insult? Why was he so long? Probably it had all been decided long ago between the BBC and the High Commissioner. The whole thing was a farce. Phootal. Anyway, I said to myself, I don't want to go to India; what on earth induced me to embark on this crazy idea. A State Dinner, a day's shooting. No. In any case, I should be a hideous failure; they are quite right. I think I'll just go, I said to myself; I can't stand the idea of this interview. Sir Bhupendranath Mitra. Sir Bhupendranath Mitra. It's a name I can never pronounce, never. Beadle will wear stiff collars to office, play tennis, shoot on appointed days, attend State Dinners. Perfect. Beedabhoy Feedabhoy. Sir Bhupendranath is now saying 'I congratulate you, Mr Beadle.'

Beadle returned. Very deliberately he put on his coat and hat, took up his umbrella, gave me a nod, went. Without a word. Well, I said to myself, what do I make of that. You'd have thought, wouldn't you, that he'd say 'Nice old boy,' or 'Terrible,' or 'Good luck,' or *something*? Not a bit of it. Mum's the word. Lady Piles opens the hospital. W. you come this way, sir?

Sir Bhupendranath Mitra sat in a room shaped like an L. The long arm of this L was empty, and gave the impression, when one entered it, of being just an empty room by itself. After an echoing exploration of the polished floor, one came quite suddenly upon Sir Bhupendranath in the short arm, as one might come upon an elephant in the jungle. And indeed there was something of the elephant about him. He was large and spreading, with small eyes and a tough black skin. Quite obviously he had the charm of an elephant too. He raised his massive bulk, shook hands silently, and we both sat down. I felt much better. Sir Bhupendranath, I said under my breath, with something approaching assurance.

Clearing his throat, Sir Bhupendranath said: 'How much do you want?'

This, of course, was the very last question I had expected. Various insane replies flashed through my mind. Nothing. Sixpence. Half-a-millon. What had Beadle said? Must I say three thousand? Play the game, old boy. I'm damned if I do. A day's shooting with Lady Piles. I said: 'I was told quite definitely that you had agreed not to discuss salaries.'

'But, my dear chap,' expostulated Sir Bhupendranath, blowing a spray of saliva over his blotting pad, 'that's rubbish. I want to write to India by the airmail tomorrow, and we've got to go through to brass tacks – cash, I mean.'

Now what do I say? 'I'm not interested in cash.' No, that'll sound as if I would go cheap. 'Three thousand.' No, I won't; it's far too much for India; it will prejudice the whole thing.

'I'm afraid, Sir Bhupendranath,' – got it – 'I can't discuss that at all without referring to the BBC.'

'Very well, very well,' said Sir Bhupendranath testily. 'Then there's nothing further we can discuss here.'

We shook hands solemnly. Was there a twinkle in his eye? Perhaps he was laughing at me. Feeling as flat as a pancake, I retired down the long arm of the L. So that's that. Of course he knew at first sight that I was useless. Not even the decency to ask me a few questions. Beadle and Lady Piles after a day's shooting at Phootal. Of course; I should have known it. Ring, ring, ring, isn't the lift working? The whole place is half-asleep. Damnably, I have been damnably treated. Good morning.

The second Great Man, who had been a Viceroy, said: 'Well now, what can I do to help you?'

He's immensely tall, I thought and looks extraordinarily young, but why wear a grey frock coat? I really haven't the foggiest idea why I came to see him.

'Well, sir, you have such a vast experience of India. I thought perhaps –'

'I'm afraid I really know very little. The longer one stays there, the less one knows. And besides, one so soon gets out of touch.'

'Perhaps you could tell me something of the people I ought to see or consult?'

'I doubt if it would be quite proper for me to do that. I expect the Government of India will do all that is necessary.'

I am muffing this interview. There must be something to be got out of him; he is a Great Man.

'It's rather difficult,' I said, 'to know what line to take. I mean, broadcasting is or should be, shouldn't it, a tolerant kind of business - I mean,' I said, getting more and more confused, 'that it's influence should perhaps be used -'

'I'll tell you what,' he said. 'Always remember the difference between influence and power, and remember that the first is the greatest.'

And with that I had to be content.

The third Great Man, who was Very Great Indeed, sitting in a very historic room and smoking a pipe, said: 'So you're going to one of the most important jobs in the Empire.'

'Do you really think that?'

'Of course I do. Broadcasting for four hundred million people. Why, your influence might come to be greater than that of the Viceroy himself.'

'Can I dare to ask whom you are sending as Viceroy?'

'A good man. An excellent man, I promise you.' He waved his pipe in a gesture of enthusiasm. 'No, I can't tell you his name at the moment. But I promise you shall see him before you go. Of course you must. And he'll want to see you. It's a most important job.'

'Your Secretary of State doesn't share your opinion.'

'What makes you think that?'

'I asked him for an interview, and his secretary wrote saying that he was too busy to see me before I left.'

'But that's nonsense. I'll see that he sees you. Here, I'll do it now.' He picked up a telephone. 'What about going to the India Office straightaway now? Could you manage that?'

'Of course.'

He spoke into the telephone.

I should not, I felt, be popular at the India Office.

There was a tremendous to-do about seeing the fourth Great Man. This puzzled me, for I had known him fairly well, and thought him intelligent, good-natured and unpretentious. Eventually I found myself being received with more pomp than is usual even in Mayfair, and ushered by several butlers (I thought) into a long, heavily overfurnished room in which I waited for some time. The Great Man at length arrived in what seemed to

me a processional aura. I stood up, very nearly saluted. Felt that I heard the National Anthem somewhere. I was offered a cigarette from a goldmounted box; the Great Man took one. He towered. I thought, I am obsessed by towerers. He sat down. I sat down. His expression was sombre; his face longer and paler than I had remembered it; his chin immense. Looking down it – a veritable Russian steppe, it must have been, seen from that angle – he said: 'I think perhaps a Commission.'

'To do what?' I asked, appalled.

'To tour India and report upon the possibilities of broadcasting.'

God forbid, I thought.

'Yes,' I said.

At this moment I developed acute appendicitis. Clearly the effect of too much towering on my internal organs.

Over lunch, convalescent, I said to Sir Bhupendranath: 'But what really made you choose me?'

'Perhaps I had a crunch.'

'Hunch.'

'Hunch, yes.'

'I don't believe it. Why, you only saw me for two minutes.'

'Quite enough.'

'No,' I said, 'I'm bothered. I feel I've somehow got in under false pretences. Beadle's so obviously the man for the Indian Civil Service; he'll be sociable, play games, shoot, and be generally popular.'

'Quite true.' Sir Bhupendranath twinkled.

'I shan't do any of those things. And I'm an untidy sort of person.'

Sir Bhupendranath twinkled even more.

'India's rather an untidy place.'

'But do you really think I can do the job?'

'I haven't any doubt about that.'

But I had. Anticipation and struggle were better, I found – as most of us do – than realization. While Great Men faintly disapproved, and Beadle was in the way, it was easy to be determined to grasp the prize; but the prize in my hand felt extremely heavy. I was committed to what might prove a foolish venture, and my own undoing. I was almost certainly ill-equipped for it; I did not know India, or any Indian language; my knowledge

of broadcasting was lop-sided and did not include engineering, the elements of which I should have to learn; I had burnt my boats and sacrificed a pension, since the BBC would give no undertaking to take me back, and I had not pressed for it; I should have to give up my house, servants and dogs, for all of which I had a considerable affection; I was thirty-nine and therefore perhaps too old a dog to learn new tricks. Indian broadcasting, or what remained of it, was in a mess; the people out there were, I had reason to believe, extremely unenthusiastic about my appointment; I might be, probably was, the wrong kind of person and, apart from India hating me, I might hate India.

These reflections were a good deal magnified by appendicitis and my friends. I felt queasy; and my friends seemed to divide themselves into three classes of Job's comforters. One, which included Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard, put down my action to a sadly mistaken spirit of bravado and ambition. Gerald made play with the CIE, generalised on the efforts of a lust for power, and missed no opportunity of saying that 'Lionel was going to devote himself to making little Indians radio-minded'. Put that way, it didn't sound so good to me. Another, more frivolous, asked with lifted eyebrows why I was exiling myself; India, he said, was a one-horse place anyway; I should hate it; I was making a great mistake. And a third, including my family, sighed and thought it a pity – though the kind of thing I would insist on doing – that I should fly off the handle when I had settled down so nicely and successfully with the BBC.

So I decided to take a trip to Russia, Germany and Italy: and see if thereby I could make myself less ignorant.

Berlin, Moscow, Rome. Snow, twisted coloured domes, the Unter den Linden, jewels in the Kremlin, the clinic for Reformed Prostitutes, Lord Perth entertaining Roman society. In Berlin a good time was had by all. The staff of the Rundfunk were quick, charming, kind; the efficiency of German broadcasting enthralled and appalled me. The never-stopping lifts were symptomatic; just as you never waited for a lift, so you never chatted in a corridor. The precision of the whole machine was an impact, an assault. I liked it; human beings seemed more lively there than in the BBC. Compared with the Rundfunk, the BBC was dawdling, with a lost motive of action. This whizz of purpose gave me an inferiority complex: I told myself for comfort that this

kind of sophisticated, expensive broadcasting wouldn't, do for India; Russia would provide a much closer parallel.

Staggering under an immense fur coat which I had hired from a theatrical costumier's, I approached the Russian Reith.

'How do you vet talks?' (Languages and distances of India).

'We don't.' Kergentsev smiled benignantly.

'You're not asking me to believe that in Soviet Russia -'

'Perhaps you'd like to come to one of our meetings.'

Why don't I know Russian? Of course everyone will say that I have been fooled. Can they really have a staff of listeners to cover every programme? It seems like that: vetting after, instead of before, the event. Perhaps it's a better way of doing things; too much 'vetting' spoils all programmes. I get the idea, and it's decidedly a natty one. Leave the transmitters on after the programme is finished, and then: 'Kharkov!'

'Sir!'

'Your talk at 8.30 was inconsistent with Soviet ideology. Report to Moscow.'

Something like that. And the public listen. Do they listen? Broadcasting here is the direct opposite of Berlin; shabby studios, out-of-date equipment, bad timing, pauses. I try to look at it from the listeners' end. The clinic for reformed prostitutes; the hospitals; the factories, the hostels. (Four people in this room? Yes, why not, ask them anything you like - aren't you a bit crowded? - ah! you don't realize what our conditions were before the revolution!) Everywhere the cone-shaped loud-speaker, twittering, twittering. Nobody listening.

'What are you doing here?'

'Oh, we're building a studio for the factory.'

'But why?'

'We have our own orchestra.'

'And what's this?'

'Oh it's a public address system for the clinic.'

'But why?'

'The Central Programmes are a bit dull.'

Decentralization. Is that something to be aimed at? I go to the villages. Heavens! What roads! But it's like a fairy-tale - these gaily painted houses in the snow! Here's the cone-shaped loud-speaker again, twittering. Nobody listening. It strikes me that the USSR has overdone broadcasting. Too much propaganda. It has become a mere background noise.

All the same, Moscow is entrancing. I am so fantastically en-

tranced that I feel like throwing India to the winds and staying here for ever. Unstable, as Reith said. Why on earth do I like it? There is something exhilarating in the air: perhaps it was always like that. The ballet, the theatre, the glittering golden domes and dull red walls of the Kremlin across the river, the incomparable St Basil's Cathedral, straight out of a fairy-tale: these are Old Russia, of course: but somehow I had never expected to find them so glowing. Kiroff has just been murdered in the Kremlin, and hundreds of people, so we're told, are being shot every day. Can't help it: it adds to the glamour. I suppose it must be frightful to be Russian: but the young Communists are invariably charming with their brilliant childish candour and endless talk. They have something we've lost – faith – maybe in a bad cause – which gives a sparkle to life.

I said, looking through palisades at an expanse of mud: 'The Palace of the Soviets doesn't seem to have got very far?'

'Oh, not yet. We've only had twenty years. And you've seen the architects drawings, haven't you?'

'Lots, and grand. But never anything finished.'

'They will be.'

'Now this is a photograph of the Peckham Health Centre.'

'No, no. That must be somewhere in the USSR.'

'But I assure you that it's in London.'

'Nothing like that in London. We know. The capitalist system –'

They *knew*. They knew because in all their twenty years they had been taught to 'know' that Russia is the finest country in the world: just as we have been conditioned to 'know' that Bolshevism is a plague. Human beings, all plodding stupidly towards the impossible moment when every Tom, Dick and Harry is healthy, wealthy and wise, separated by propaganda into warring nations. Why do I have anything to do with broadcasting?

'It's a wonderful station. All that marble! And what beautiful lighting! But why don't the trains run?'

'They will. Moscow will have the finest tube-service in the world.'

'London has quite a big one, you know.'

'No, no. Very old-fashioned, if it has one.'

Talk and more talk. In an interval during the ballet, we stand and watch the couples parading in the foyer, two by two, in dreadful orderliness. G, who is never ill, says: 'I want some air.'

The Bolshoi theatre is a labyrinth. I say: 'Dashed if I know where it is.'

Moving along the red-carpeted corridors, G says: 'Sorry, very sorry. I'm going to faint on you.'

She does. I stagger to a settee with the body. Cholera? Typhus? I can't speak a word of Russian; and nobody takes the slightest notice of us. I rush along the corridor, find a commissionaire dozing, seize him, drag him. (Shall I be shot for this?) He evinces no surprise: takes G's head, motions me to take feet: we proceed. No one even faintly interested. We arrive at dressing-station in the theatre – would you believe it? Doctor and nurse in white coats: bottles: Red Army man, apparently dead, on stretcher. Doctor applies valerian under G's nose. Her eyes flicker: I know that she sees Red Army man. 'Damn it all,' she says in a small voice, 'I only want a loo.' Yes: and how am I to make the doctor understand that? He applies valerian again: G waves it away petulantly.

'Write it down, you fool!'

I write w.c. on a scrap of paper, show it to the doctor, who ignores it and applies valerian again. I am too panic-stricken to remember that oo is the official sign in these parts (why don't we internationalize these things: surely they're just as important as the Post Office?). I shake the doctor: it's a heroic gesture because I feel sure that I shall be shot for it. No good. Valerian again.

G says in a weak voice: 'Give me the damned paper. After all, I'm an artist.'

She draws vividly. The doctor's beard wags in delight. They disappear together. Presently G comes down the grand staircase, laughing.

'Funniest thing that's happened to me for years.'

'M'm.' I say. 'Funnier still if you had cholera.'

I was frightened. Why? Because one senses something callous and unsympathetic? In a crisis, human life and feelings don't count as they do with us. Yet the doctor and the dressing-station were efficient. But not, somehow, comforting.

It's a puzzle. Never in my life have I felt so unselfconscious. If ever one breathed a free air, it is here. Because I'm English? I don't know. I have the impression, and God knows that it isn't based on any communist propaganda, that these people, in spite of bad living conditions, in spite of poverty, in spite of the OGPU, have somehow grasped the secret of living *together*.

There is an absence — perhaps in Russia there always was — of envy, greed, malice, and (above all) convention. I am not in the least surprised or offended when Soviet youngsters drift into the American Ambassador's box in the intervals of the opera. They crowd me out of it, lean over the balcony: if an Englishman came out of the gallery and did it, I'd hit him. And I'd hate him, because he'd do it out of spite. These people do it because it's perfectly natural that anybody should go anywhere. Impossible to explain this. It's ten thousand miles from the sneers of a *Daily Worker* or the complacency of a *Times*. Everybody taking everybody on trust in a vague, incurious, delightful way. Perhaps incurious is really the keyword. When I look out of my window in the morning I have the feeling that if I cross the Red Square in my pyjamas and sit in meditation in the snow on the top of Lenin's tomb, no one will take the slightest notice. That kind of attitude frightened me, of course, when G fainted: yet, if it's a general attitude, doesn't it free one from a million restraints? Is it perhaps the elementary step to freedom to let one's neighbour do as he likes without peering and goggling, without saying — or even thinking — 'What's that fellow up to? What *right* has he . . . What a funny-looking man . . . What peculiar clothes . . . What a nasty, lovely, strange, odd, bad, good, face . . . 'Live and let live' — we English pride ourselves on that: yet, Cheka or no Cheka, I never began to understand what that really might mean until I went to Russia. And in spite of bugs and what not, I said good-bye to Moscow with regret.

Snow and more snow and the frontier station again. I smuggle a bottle of vodka through, for no other reason than to see if it can be done. It can be done. At the centre table, young officials read all my books with apparent attention, and at great length. We wait, but it doesn't matter; nothing in Russia seems to matter quite so much as elsewhere. We drink vodka and avoid looking at the excellent maps and graphs which cover every wall; we have seen too many graphs, Russians are graph-mad.

We rumble on over snow-covered plains. Poland. On and on and on. Monotonous dazzle. Why do men fight continually for this frightful bit of country? Warsaw. The snow disappearing. Forests. I ought to have flown this journey. Yet it's amazing how swiftly one achieves it. Innsbruck and snow again. Gay parties of skiers. Through the tunnels. Sunshine, and the soft Italian language. The dome of St Peter's across the Campagna and a

sense of homecoming. What country in the world can compare with Italy?

Lord Perth is entertaining. Ribbons, sashes, diamonds. Glitter of sleek heads and silks. 'Like to see the Big Boy?' 'The Big Boy?' 'Yes, I'll take you to the parade tomorrow.' Yes, I'd like to see the Big Boy. Here I am on the dais. I feel embarrassed and self-conscious. Do I look all right? My clothes. *Eccellenza*. Alfonso next to me – they think here that he has the evil eye. Orderly crowds. Speckless cavalry. Smart is the adjective for everything and everybody here. And now there's a distant sound of cheering – but no, it isn't cheering, it's just two staccato syllables. '*Du – ce! Du – ce!*' Even cheering has gone smart; I must say they do it well, and it's exciting in a mobbish way. The Big Boy is here; I can touch him; goodness, I could even kill him. Perhaps I ought to. The crowd's enthusiasm is immense. It's exactly like MacLeish's *Fall of the City*. 'The armour is empty; there's nothing inside it.' All the same, I am rather carried away myself; as a dramatic spectacle, it's superb. And, after all, why not *panem et circenses*?

The cavalry goes through its paces. That famous slither down the steep bank. But after it, a new venture on this occasion, come whippet tanks, forty of them, coming at forty miles an hour. 'We can do it as well.' Over the steep bank they go. Some of them fly off the edge and fall the thirty feet, plump, bury their noses in the ground. How do the men inside stand it? Off they go again, over the horizon; we all move too, and find ourselves looking down into a wide valley, at the bottom of which the tanks are re-forming. Then up they come, straight at us, in close formation, a mass of rushing steel. Everyone makes an involuntary movement to step back; the Big Boy is amused; the line of tanks stops dead just in front of us. We are invited to examine them. Well. Very interesting. No, thank you, though; I don't come to Italy for this kind of thing.

All the same, Rome is improved, I thought, on my way to the EIAR. This smartness and gaiety have their effect; no feeling of depression here. The old trams gone; no vehicle allowed to sound horn or siren. That's as it should be; why don't we all do it? Once so noisy, Rome has regained peace; what's more, everybody drives better. The enchanting Lisa Sergio receives me at EIAR.

'How many languages now, Signorina, nine or ten?'

'You always flatter. But I'd like you to hear our new American announcer.'

'Signorina Sergio, no doubt.'

'Listen and tell me if it is.'

Italian radio listeners, compared with the millions of Germany, England or Russia, are scanty – a mere fifty thousand. Why? Well, says Lisa, the Italians are a peaceful people, not very interested in international squabbles; and then, they mostly make their own music, and prefer it to tinned stuff; and, above all, spend most of their time out of doors. I wonder if that applies to India, too. Italian radio, though comparatively poor in funds, is spruce and inventive. A system of simultaneous broadcasting by short-wave relays is a useful tip for India. Multiple studios and panels, those sacraments of the BBC, are derided; everything and anything can be done from one studio. Yes, I think it can. I watch through a glass window a whole symphony in full blast, and not a sound reaches me; uncanny sensation, I feel that I have suddenly gone deaf. But such sound-proofing is miraculous. 'Every village must have the radio,' says the Duce. So a village set has been evolved by competition among the manufacturers. The result is much better than the German state-made 'people's set', though a bit more expensive. I am beginning to have radio indigestion. Good-bye, Lisa; may you never do propaganda against us! Good-bye, Rome; may you never be a forbidden city.

Visit a perfectly kept garden, and you may feel some dissatisfaction, though not necessarily envy, when you return to your own. The ground-elder is getting the better of you; the lawn is a disgrace; the hedges need clipping; the whole lay-out is, after all, rather inept. Any non-pachydermatous traveller visiting totalitarian or communist states in the thirties must have felt some pang of uneasiness on his return to England. Something was amiss, but what? The aspirations and actions of Germany, Russia, Italy, might be misguided, as one was led to believe, but had England any source at all of aspiration or action? In Rome, Berlin, Moscow, eyes might flash with sinister intent, still, they flashed attractively; perhaps the walk was Gestapo-pricked, still, it was supple and alert; but what about Bond Street and Hammersmith Broadway, and the Old Kent Road? If, as our propaganda had it, the apparent vigour of three European nations was prompted only by revolvers, were the fishy eyes and listless faces of England so much more to be commended? And if unemployment had been abolished by ruthless methods, was there nothing ruthless about Jarrow and the Rhondda Valley?

Perhaps we know the answer now: perhaps we don't. My reactions in 1935 did not amount to much more than a feeling of impatience, a sense of disappointment in the England to which I returned; London seemed suddenly more dingy; faces in the Tube more pasty, shop-windows less bright. But in my own field, that of broadcasting, I felt indignant. Though many of us had for some time been conscious that the flame lighted with enthusiasm at Savoy Hill was burning low, it was the contrast with other broadcasting organisations which, for me at least, threw the elephantine bureaucracy of Portland Place into startling relief. How had we come to this? At Savoy Hill we had regarded broadcasting as a crusade; at first, perhaps, as only a small one, for I don't think many recognized its full potentialities, whatever may be said now; but later as something to which we should and must devote our whole time and energy. We had become broadcasting bores; we could not go to parties without looking for possible performers, discussing possible ideas; we could not read books or hear music without applying the author or the composition to the microphone; all our waking hours were given, and given with immense pleasure, to the methods of making the microphone serve humanity. We believed, we really did believe, strange as it may seem, that 'Nation should speak peace unto Nation'; and, short of staff, blundering through technical ignorance, searching, inventing, failing, rehearsing, we felt pride and happiness in the job and never doubted that:

*... music's prison'd rapture and the drown'd voice of truth
mantled in light's velocity, over land and sea,
are omnipresent, speaking aloud to every ear,
into every heart and home their unhinder'd message
the body and soul of Universal Brotherhood*

But now?

Now, in the first place, the programme was no longer the thing. It was wiser, in the BBC of 1935, to be a 'good administrator' than to have any original ideas; better to spend your time cutting down artists' fees than rehearsing the artist; more paying to use a blue pencil than your mind. The Controllers appointed by Reith were men who had never distinguished themselves in the programme field; their ignorance was an accepted joke. Fast and furiously they were crowding the swollen staff with men of their own type, just as Waterfield and Macadam were to crowd the Ministry of Information four years later; and where one

lively person had sufficed to run many programmes every week with vigour, there were now six tired young men, each complaining that to 'look after' one talk a day was too much. Perhaps it was, considering the amount of time which had now to be wasted in arguing about fees with 'Executive' or 'Administration', in 'covering copyright', in holding 'conferences', in 'setting down your reasons on paper', and generally in doing anything except applying oneself to the real business of thinking out programmes and producing them effectively. *That* was at a discount.

Perhaps all organisations, as they grow, must become bureaucratic, for the very simple reason that a very small proportion of the human race possesses inventive ability and resource, and some place and purpose has to be found for the great majority, the mediocre. Certain it was that pomposity and bureaucracy, conspicuous by their absence at Savoy Hill, established themselves firmly at Portland Place. And for my part I vowed that, wherever I reigned in broadcasting, 'administration' should never get the upper hand. Thus I put myself against the majority, and the course of my rake's progress might, I am sure, have been predicted by any nicely-established civil servant. I wasn't, myself, altogether unaware that my success would almost certainly also involve my failure.

Journeying, convalescing, and meditating upon larger aspects of broadcasting than had hitherto come my way, I also kept three permanent nightmares in the background of my life. One was a Hindustani grammar; a second was the Government of India Act, 1935; a third was broadcasting engineering. In hospital I had waded laboriously through two volumes of grammar, and spattered much paper with my gawky Urdu script; that engaging old bluffer, Sir Denison Ross, had provided me with a teacher (English) who omitted to tell me that his accent was deplorable, and that to learn the printed script was a waste of time. Nor did I realize the immense gulf between European and Oriental languages. I put my slow progress down to advancing age, and despaired.

I also despaired quite a lot over the Government of India Act. Central, Provincial, reserved subjects; communal electorates, creeds, castes; Princes, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Buddhists and Backward Tribes; district commissioners, police superintendents, legislatures, *tabisildars*; the Government of India comprises the Governor General in Council, the Finance Member, the Law Member, the Member for Industries and Labour, the

Commander-in-Chief, and Uncle Tom Cobley and all. A meritorious document, balanced, precise, just, readable (just); it lamentably failed to engage my attention. It was too like the BBC, faces in the Tube, pinstripe trousers; not a flicker of humanity marred its august pages. Painstakingly I searched for a reference to broadcasting; for surely, I thought, as problem after problem was unfolded, examined, and placed on its appropriate shelf, surely, in this immense, sprawling, illiterate country, broadcasting could educate, unify, and direct as no other medium could. The spoken word could run like fire once again through India. But the grey volumes said no, we don't deal in fire, and we don't like new things; our findings are based on a careful study of the status quo and how it can be maintained without upsetting Imperial traditions in these upsetting days when natives have the face to object to being called natives, and we actually have to change the name of Imperial Delhi, which we built with twenty million pounds of good Indian money, and call it New Delhi. So don't, said the grey volumes, talk about broadcasting and unity, because unity, except as a pious aspiration, is a dangerous thing; and that's just why the benevolent British Raj finds all these problems so terribly difficult to solve, and writes about them at such length. But you will, added the grey volumes, find that we haven't forgotten about broadcasting in Section 129. And I read:

(1) The Federal Government *shall not unreasonably refuse* to entrust to the Government of any Province or the Ruler of any Federated State such functions with respect to broadcasting as may be necessary to enable that Government or Ruler

(a) to construct and use transmitters in the Province or State

(b) to regulate, and impose fees in respect of, the construction and use of transmitters and the use of receiving apparatus in the Province or State:

Provided that nothing in this subsection shall be construed as requiring the Federal Government to entrust to any such Government or Ruler any control over the use of transmitters constructed or maintained by the Federal Government or by persons authorised by the Federal Government, or over the use of receiving apparatus by persons so authorised.

(2) Any functions so entrusted to a Government or Ruler shall

be exercised subject to such conditions as may be imposed by the Federal Government, including notwithstanding anything in this Act, any conditions with respect to finance, but *it shall not be lawful* for the Federal Government so to *impose any conditions regulating the matter broadcast* by, or by authority of, the Government or Ruler.

• But, of course, there was the usual catch at the end.

(5) Nothing in this section shall be construed as restricting the powers conferred on the Governor-General by this Act for the prevention of any grave menace to the peace or tranquillity of India, or as prohibiting the imposition on Governments or Rulers of such conditions regulating matter broadcast as appear to be necessary to enable the Governor-General to discharge his functions in so far as he is by or under this Act required in the exercise thereof to act in his discretion or to exercise his individual judgement.

The last three lines, from 'to enable', are recommended by me for insomnia. Did the Romans, or anyone else, ever make quite such fantastic legislation?

But what did it all mean? It meant, no doubt, like most of the Sections, that somebody was trying to 'check' something: but what it seemed to me, more threateningly, to imply, was that the Reforms would pave the way, not to a unified system of broadcasting but to its opposite. Every Government and every Prince could cash in on the new medium. And how! Every State would have its Luxembourg, its jazz or Indian equivalent, its advertisement racket, its playing-down-to-the-lowest-common-factor-of-taste. Unless Indian broadcasting could, within the next year or two, acquire, so to speak, an All India Personality, which would hold it together, something of that kind was bound to happen. Or so I thought. Perhaps I was wrong, perhaps right,^{*} but after reading that section, I felt an urgent sense of time's winged chariot which guided a good many of my subsequent actions.

And then there was the accursed machine itself. My stupidity as well as my ignorance baulked me here. I listened to the crystal-clear discourses of Sir Noel Ashbridge, took radio sets to pieces and put them together again under the charming eye of Mr Pulling, visited transmitters, wandered about the Control

The Federal Government, never, of course, actually came into being.

Room endeavouring to cope with the ribald comments of Mr Bottle, and evermore came out by that same door as in I went; or so it seemed. In fact, I learned something; as much, perhaps, as any Director of Broadcasting should ever know. The captain of a ship should not fiddle too much with the engines. But subsequent experience convinced me that the BBC system of separating engineers from programme staff, and letting neither know what the other was doing, was and is a bad one. Programme people should know enough to have a healthy respect for the difficulties of engineers; and engineers should be encouraged to take an interest in programmes, and to help programme directors actively in the placing of artists, the use of the right type of microphone and studio, and so on. Failing some effort to bring this about, you get, in almost any broadcasting organisation, a state of idiotic jealousies arising between the two sides; the engineers talk contemptuously of the programmes as 'stuff', and find programme directors supercilious and irritating; programme directors write off the engineers as nit-wits because they themselves understand nothing of engineering difficulties. The BBC remedied this to some extent by the establishment of their 'school' in 1936; but it was a rather feeble remedy for a chosen few.

I, certainly, had very little wisdom. I was fatally undecided as to whether Broadcasting in India was Fun or a Mission. I could debunk myself up to a certain point but no further. Reason informed me that the appointment of a lightweight like myself was, as far as Government Departments, Dignity, Decorations and Decorum went, absurd: and that my wisest course was to extract every possible ounce of amusement from an adventure which would end in an explosion. Emotion and vanity told me that I was a Saviour, speeding to the rescue of poor black people, to whom I should be most frightfully nice (so long, said Reason, as they are most frightfully subservient to you). Ambition told me (and still does) that I was capable of creating a much better service than the BBC. I was in a constant state of falling between all these stools. And so, I fancy, whether they knew it or not, were most people who went to India. The immensities and potentialities of India were exciting: the temptation to exchange argumentative Britons for admiring submissive Indians was great: and the ease (if they weren't sufficiently admiring and submissive) of sliding into files, golf, a good salary and a perfect climate, had practically killed all English decency and initiative

in the Indian Civil Service. India was a Paradise for those who were willing to sell the pass in the sense of supporting, over innumerable whiskies-and-sodas, an imperialist oligarchy which was as dead as the dodo, and failing to realize that the real Britain might be a close friend of the real India. But I can't claim that I was any better. I fought madly, and perhaps quite stupidly, in what Mr Gandhi told me was 'a No-man's-land in which everyone will throw stones at you'. In other words, I hated Indian inefficiency, Indian inferiority complex, Indian noise, and Indian dirt, just as much as I hated British cruelty, British patronage, British complacency, and British bad taste. And so, loving nobody, I found myself, so to speak, in the middle of an Asiatic Rugby scrum in which I kicked everybody and everybody kicked me. But that, of course, is not the whole story. Kicks or no kicks, India took your heart: she would not let you ever again see complete righteousness in the dark cities and stuffy enclosures of the West.

Broadcasting House, London, W1

August 13, 1935

My dear Fielden,

I felt particularly inadequate this afternoon to cope with the momentous issues of your departure but, as I said, you can imagine lots that I didn't say; and probably at one time or another I have said them – in part anyhow.

You certainly realized the supreme responsibility which is committed to you, and what you have it in your power to do. I don't know that anyone – not excluding the Viceroy – can do for India what you can.

Don't mind my urging you again to tread like Agag – very delicately – and to be very wary. Perhaps the less you say the better for many months to come. I know what it will be – the suffering of fools, to say the least; but one gets that in every walk of life and it is always hard for men, like you, of quick intelligence and eager disposition. Impatience and such qualities are gifts of the gods and they're also instruments of the devil.

It is your kind of temperament which is required and essential for this work. It is your temperament which will in due course, make a triumphant success. But do remember that it's also – quite as much – that very same temperament which, in a minute or a week, can produce disaster. It's therefore not just temperament

but your temperament conditioned and controlled that is wanted. And I believe you will need to do a powerful lot of conditioning and controlling of it – and so many won't do that. They think it's an insult to their intelligence or capacity. It isn't. The strongest man is the one who, with mighty abilities over others, submits, is patient and never loses hope.

One other word which even to write is a great embarrassment to me: I believe profoundly that if you ask the Almighty to run this business and take you through all the troubles and perplexities and irritations, and believe as you ask, then you'll have something impossible, quite likely, otherwise.

*All good go with you,
Yours very sincerely,
SD. J. REITH*

Chapter Four

One man in every five is an Indian. The other four are, let's say, an American, a European, a Negro, and a Chinese. Doesn't that make you feel very important? It is rather a staggering thought, isn't it, that we Indians are not much less than a fifth of the human race and that, next to China, our country has the biggest population in the world? And doesn't it make us feel keen to take our proper share in the ordering and settling of the world's affairs?

MINOO MASANI - OUR INDIA

Saturday August 17th. On board SS *Poona*. Called by revolting Goanese steward – where is Goa, anyway? – at 7.30, which I consider an insult on board ship. Ships give me claustrophobia; why didn't I go by air? Told that breakfast is at 8.30 – monstrous! Fan in cabin below making noise like aeroplane; can't sleep, so get up. Seldom seen a filthier cabin; one bathroom apparently to sixty cabins. Peerless day; sea like blue silk and not a cloud; a light breeze gently fanning. Endeavour to skulk to unassuming table in diningroom unobserved; no good; marshalled to Captain's table and placed firmly between Colonel Grating (agent for Standoni's wireless transmitters in India) and Mrs Grating (agent for Colonel Grating). Almost positive that Gratings have specially arranged to sail on my ship: shall have a complex about Standoni's. Mrs G very refayned, with black frizzy hair, eyes intended to be starry, and absolutely blinding row of false teeth which she clearly considers indistinguishable from real. Colonel G whitehaired and monocled, with desperate battered remains of good looks: persuasive cringing manner and mean face. Skipper, obviously intentionally, looking exactly like George V: opposite him Major General Somebody, head like a red-hot egg and extraordinary manner of repeating everything, e.g.

Mrs Grating: 'Ai always say, General, that kippers are the very best things for breakfast!'

General: (very slowly) 'Kippers are the best things for breakfast.' (Pause) 'Yes, by jove, kippers are the best things for breakfast, eh!'

There's a fat white woman whom nobody, surely, can ever have loved – though East of Suez you never know – going to Cairo; she's jolly, I fear.

'Lovely day! Bright and early! These trips are *such fun!* And the Captain's such a *dear!* So many times I've sailed on the dear old *Poona!*'

Yes, yes, yes, Mrs Watson: you wait, I'll murder you presently. I bet you play deck quoits and have a fancy dress.

Colonel Jolly. Indian Medical Service. Belies his name, Dour, dried-up, silent. I rather like him.

'Not been East Before? You wait for the Red Sea. Innoculated?'

Don't know that I do like him. Cornelia Sorabji: I've met her before; Parsee lawyeress, wedded to Imperialism. Thought Parsees were Hindus, what an error! Said I believed in the transmigration of souls.

'I don't want to be a fly, if that's what you mean,' said Cornelia.

No, no. Do I want to be a fly? Cornelia is exactly my idea of a witch. I don't like witches, however clever.

Fourteen days at this table will drive me demented.

Stealthily I go on deck; ambushed; forced into deck chair by combined and skilful Grating manoeuvre. Do I know about the Peshawar experiment? Yes, I do. Yes, I know that Standoni's have lent a transmitter and village sets. The whole thing in a nutshell? Well (looking as wise as I can) I don't know. Dammit, I *don't* know. Engineers? Oh, certainly. Where from? Well –

'Ai don't want to talk business!' says Mrs Grating, archly. 'This is the taim to enjoy ourselves!'

Well, I must go and write letters. Yes, really. You see the BBC gave me a present: lots of names inscribed in a book; I have to write to them all before Port Said. Yes, really! What was the present – why, a gold cigarette-case, what else. Yes, this one.

'Oh, ai do think you're a lucky, lucky man!'

It's impossible to sit down in my cabin, one must lie or stand, so I pace it, thinking, am I a lucky, lucky man? Adopt the Coué principle: 'I am, I am, a lucky man.' Assuredly yes. Who would not envy me, spreadeagling the globe to set up a new service in a huge country? Why the devil, I ask myself, don't I get more kick out of it? A jeering imp sits in my soul, and will not be dislodged. 'After all, what do you *know* about India?' 'Nothing, but –' 'Very little about broadcasting if you come to think of it?'

'Dammit, eight years -' 'Oh, but not in engineering or publications or the legal side or administration.' 'Damn administration!' 'They'll expect it - they won't like your type.' 'They? Who's they?' 'Well, you've never been a popular person, anyway.' 'No, I know, but -' 'Ah, India will be just the same - and then you don't even know the language properly, fancy that!' Shut up, imp, shut up: I must do my Hindustani grammar, and go through the 1935 Act again. This cabin is dreary beyond belief. 'Yes, read your silly books: they won't get you anywhere because you're much too old, old, *old!!!*' Dear imp, please imp, leave me alone: the die is cast: I must have confidence. Could I fly from Cairo, I wonder? Because this ship really is hell to me. A funny thing that, when you think about it: what's heaven to some is hell to others: a satisfactory after-life is unimaginable and so is Marxism. A ship is hell to me because I hate being inactively shut up: but then, why should an aeroplane be better? Because it goes faster. Sheer escapism, perhaps: I can't face the imp. If I arrive in Delhi by air ten days earlier than the scheduled Bombay by boat, what happens? It might be spectacular, but the Government of India, I suspect, won't care one bit for spectacular subordinates. Do I care whether they care or not? A moot point: they pay me, after all: but then the money is Indian money, and loyalty, said Liddell Hart once, may mean only a conspiracy of mutual inefficiency. I think I might fly.

Wednesday August 21st. The evening star glitters in an orange sky as we slide into the Canal. Young man on the bridge tells me that he is going from Sandhurst to join the Ethiopian Air Force: General Red Hot Egg (who turns out to be enchanting, and clearly uses the repetition formula as camouflage) points out the mast specially created to tether R.101. To *Thee*, I think, be ascribed all might, majesty, dominion, and power - that's what they all say every Sunday. And I'm going to India: yes, and on this confounded boat. Would the shipping line cash my cheque? 'No, sir, we never do it.' 'But, dammit, you've got all my luggage, plus a car, on board: you can risk it.' 'No, it's against regulations.' 'But Imperial Airways have offered me a seat from Palestine onwards.' 'Sorry, sir, you might try in Port Said or Cairo.' 'But how long is the *Poona* stopping?' 'Can't say: depends on the shipping in the Canal.' I haver angrily: rush ashore at Port Said: no cashing of cheques there: shall I take the train to Cairo? No: daren't: might get stuck. And then what? Oh, for God's sake, I

tell myself crossly, do have some courage and decision. And return feebly to the *Poona*. Now our searchlight throws its long beam down the straight black glimmer of the Canal, and silence seems to be closing drowsily behind us as the quiet ship glides on: once again, gratefully, I hear that Eastern silence, broken only by the far, hysteric yap of a pi-dog among the sand-dunes. Bombs on Ethiopian villages, a mast for R.101: the night broods over man's follies.

Friday August 23rd. The Red Sea in August has the attributes of a mild nightmare. The temperature mounts, 84, 87, 89, 95 – not so very high, but humidity mounts too, and a white mist descends, enveloping the ship so closely that even the sea disappears, and dim sweating shapes falter across decks suspended on warm cotton-wool. The heat does not thaw the ice of small-talk: a stoker, the Captain tells me, has just run up the funnel and gone overboard; 124°, he adds, down there. 'They often do it.' Can I go down? Well, no. The Captain changing the conversation, adds that I may be interested in the old wireless apparatus, which has only a two hundred miles range. Of course, the *Poona* is to be broken up in the Far East at the end of this voyage: this progression through cotton-wool is the last of her many voyages down the Red Sea. A ghostly ship about to become a ghost: what happens, I wonder, to things like baths and settees and panelling and port-holes when ships are broken up?

Monday August 26th. Aden behind us, we pitch gently through the Arabian Sea. The Captain (who evidently enjoys giving passengers a good dose of alarm and despondency) announces with a chuckle that a ship ahead reports 'heavy swell', while the *Kaiser-i-Hind*, which left Bombay on Saturday and will pass us tomorrow, caps that with 'strong wind and high seas'.

Tuesday August 27th. Cornelia Sorabji examines me in Urdu, which (if I knew it) is rather like a Greek examining an American in French. I now know the life-history of the Gratings. General Red Hot Egg achieves eighty circuits of the heaving deck, sweat pouring in his wake. Queasy, I follow his example: exercise restores me. I begin quite suddenly to think the whole business is great fun, and I have just as much capacity as the next man to undertake it. A change of heart? Mrs Grating tells me a funny story about the Englishman who said to the Indian 'Are you a good sailor?' and got the indignant reply 'No, sir, I am a

first-class passenger.' I laugh at this, and check myself: good heavens, am I laughing at Mrs Grating's jokes? Obviously my standards have fallen.

Thursday August 29th. How much more, I ask the Captain, while I nervously clutch the bridge, *can* she roll – without going over, I mean? He says, glancing indifferently down the decks. 'Oh, about ten degrees.' I go below, and wedging myself into a settee, try to collect my thoughts. I must write down something about Indian broadcasting. Can't think of anything to write. Take a pad and write 'Indian Broadcasting' and draw a line underneath that. That seems to be all. After a time I write 'The first principle of any broadcasting organisation . . .' At this point Colonel Grating staggers towards me with a whisky-and-soda, and, laying a hand on my knee, says in a voice of deep significance, 'Well, my boy – well my boy, this time tomorrow . . . you will be a member of the Government of India.' And I very nearly heard him say, under his breath, 'Incredible!'

ONE OF THE SIX THOUSAND LETTERS WHICH AWAITED ME

14th September, '35

My Lord,

My Lord, it is on the 2nd of this month that I had sent one envelope to you, my Lord, as a stranger requesting therein to forward and recommend my application to Mr E. J. Belton. My Lord, in writing to you I had had an infusing idea that I was writing to God and that God being 'ind to helpless creatures is sure to help and hence taking you, my Lord, as God to me I had every hope that you would help me.

My Lord: the Govt of India Gazette shows that you have taken over charge from Mr Belton and now therefore I have a greater hope of achieving the post of the Programme Assistant. When everything is in your hand and when writing to you I have an idea that I am writing to God direct in heaven who is a helper of the helpless, a recommendation to those who are devoid of recommendations as in these days, success follows those who have sources and recommendations but I being lacking in these aspects beg to approach you, My Lord, whom I have taken as a God to me, to favour me. The applications were to reach up to

n th of this month and today it is 14th but no mandate I have entertained from you, My Lord.

If I could not get success through you, my Lord, my God, I would think myself to be the most unfortunate as unfortunate according to my views are those who do not get success when they leave to the mercy of God and as I have entirely taken you as God and have left myself entirely on your mercy I am either to get success or term myself as 'most unfortunate and devoid of God's help'.

My Lord: think of my sentiments to you and to my Mother Mrs Fielden she is a Goddess to me and I expect every favour from my Mother.

My Lord, my God: grant me an interview before you select others for these posts.

My Lord, my God, accept my homage to you and to my dear Mother, Mrs Fielden.

Awaiting a reply from you,

Yours obediently,

SHIRA SHANKAR

With infernal cheek and of my own free will, I went to India to place myself at the head of a cultural organisation in a country whose history I scarcely knew, not one of whose two hundred languages I had mastered, whose customs I had not bothered to study, whose dress I should not copy, whose art was a closed book to me, whose literature was a dim translated shadow: and I thought, God bless me, that it was very good of me to go at all. Of course that's putting the case rather violently: still, there's an element in British make-up which does make us think *au fond*, however much we hide it, that we confer a distinct favour on all foreigners by deigning to visit them: and it's quite enough to earn the very cordial dislike of other races. India, in my experience, ranked snubbing as a greater sin than Imperialism, and put good manners and intelligence on a higher plane than nationalism or the colour of a skin. And that's what the British, not excluding myself, failed to grasp. I, with a touch of exhibitionism, might sit upon the floor or talk to prostitutes or stay at Wardha with Mr Gandhi: but in my heart of hearts I am sure I felt a bit superior to it all: and nobody recognizes that hidden feeling quicker than an Indian. In other words, both reactionaries and extremists were essentially right about India: it is the cursed

moderates who were wrong, always. Rule India with a rod of iron and a tremendous swagger and India liked it: love India genuinely and humbly and India loved you: but put on pinstripe trousers and write judicially and impartially on files and India knifed you - rightly. Or pretend, like me, to be awfully nice and broad-minded, and India made you know in the end, with some discomfort, that you were sitting on a lonely fence.

If the future is a mirror towards which the past marches to meet itself, any such looking-glass held up to me as I rolled towards Bombay on the *Poona* might well have induced me to purchase a return ticket at once. In it I could have seen, it is true, the Success of my Mission in terms of fourteen glittering transmitters and a staff to do them service in a most efficient way: but I should have been appalled to see also the End of My Fun, in the shape of personal loves and hatreds, rages and frustrations, and an eventful bankruptcy of faith: worse still perhaps, the dreadful use of the instrument which I had created, the harnessing of broadcasting to the obscene chariot of war. I think, I hope, I should have turned back then, in 1935.

But mirrors to the future aren't yet in general use, and my arrival at Bombay was simply dull. I think I must have expected glamour: I'm sure I didn't expect smelly darkness, drenching rain, and a temperature which forced the sweat to soak one's clothing before the rain could. I leant over a wet rail and looked down on desolate glistening quays, spattered with swaddled sleeping coolies: and felt vaguely that, as Controller of Broadcasting to the Government of India, I ought to do something. And although it was four in the morning, the absence of Somebody Important to greet me ruffled my temper: it was inefficiency or an insult. If the Indian officialdom (or even Indian curiosity) wasn't asleep, it should surely meet all boats on the chance of interesting passengers: not least, I felt, the first Controller of Broadcasting. But nothing stirred, and hot heavy silence brooded over the port. I returned, perforce, to my cabin, and awaited the day.

It brought *The Times of India*, very dark and incoherent, knocking at the door. What were my plans for Indian broadcasting? What was the state of British Broadcasting? 'None and lousy; and I'm not giving an interview,' I said. I was angry, because I wished to walk delicately with the Indian press. Reith had warned me of the pitfalls - rather overwarned me perhaps: visions of Reith and Riddell manoeuvring for a place in the

public sun. However, I had tried to be good by sending to the Government of India the text of what I proposed to say to the press on my arrival, asking them to modify or alter it as they thought fit. And now here I was, without an answer. Beans I could spill in plenty, but should I? I could have said a mouthful about the purposes of broadcasting as I conceived them: but the conceptions of Delhi and Simla would be, I feared, very different from mine. How often, afterwards, did I wish that I had then spilt every possible and impossible bean, rammed the press of India full of the wildest ideas before anyone could stop me. But no: caution and Reithism prevailed, and I awaited Mr Gog, the Bombay engineer, who probably had my orders in his lazy pocket. I hereby caution all who find themselves in similar positions to spill the beans and damn the consequences.

The colourlessness of my cabin and the apparent colourlessness of Bombay – for even at night there is colour or not colour about a place – gave me to brood on vocations generally. I had been born a painter, and a painter I remained and should remain, whether fulfilled or unfulfilled no matter. It may seem a matter irrelevant to India and broadcasting, but I must go on about it, because missed or mistaken vocations seem, increasingly, a characteristic of our 'civilization': most men can do one or two things with spirit, skill, and pleasure: but the educational formulas and conventions of a mechanical age tend more and more to iron out the individual, to erase rather than encourage his particular bent. In the year of grace 1943, when we were plunging everybody into factories and expecting them all, irrespective of their characters, to go to it, we were still unable to realize that people who like machines will work them well, and people who prefer puddings or pictures won't. Anyhow, in that year of grace 1935, I was really an unhappy painter, born by some error to a wealthy Master of Foxhounds, and gently propelled by him into decorous pursuits such as the Army and the Foreign Office, until I had finally come uneasily to rest in the mezzo-artistic but still respectable sphere of broadcasting. Of course, I was good at my job, because even the semi-artist is much more clever than the bureaucrat: but I was shinning up the wrong tree all the same. Like so many people who can't find a nice quiet creative outlet, I had a craze for crusades: being unable to improve canvas with paint, I set out to improve humanity: a grave error. It took India to teach me that Browning couldn't have been righter about the awkwardness of playing with souls.

I didn't attempt to play with the soul of my second visitor. He was an emissary from that fuzzy, self-made saint, C. F. Andrews, an emissary, so to speak, from the stricken people of India. I ought to have warmed to him. But somehow I just didn't; I couldn't keep my attention on him. Again and again, in the five years that followed, he would appear in various places throughout the length and breadth of India and in a soft voice remind me that he had been the first to welcome me: as frequently I failed absolutely to remember his name and face. I am certain that he was an estimable character with a heart of gold: but he had no colour: he was colourless: and never have I been able to pierce a dull exterior to discover a heart of gold. I need people to be colourful saints or scamps: and now you may begin to see the kind of trouble which was brewing for me in the attempt to create a whole broadcasting organisation from scratch. But now the unnamed – whose name even now escapes me – pointed over the rail and said: 'Here comes Mr Gog.'

I looked down and saw a fat body and part of a dark fleshy face under a vast solar topee ambling foreshortened towards the gangway. Even before Mr Gog, speculator in radio's problematical future, gained the deck and flashed at me his oily ceremonial smile, I knew that he and I were destined to quarrel.

Now, now, says reason, for this is a reasonable age, how in the world could you know any such thing? You cannot, says reason, judge a man by his looks or his walk or his solar topee. I must reply that I certainly can. Whatever else I have been doubtful about in this mortal life – and God knows it gets more puzzling every day – I have never had any doubt at all about what I look for in human beings. The trouble is that God has arranged my grey matter to demand a combination of qualities – bad or good makes no matter – which seem distressingly rare. And my eight years of broadcasting in London, that daily meeting with, and testing of, the supposedly 'great', had narrowed, rather than amplified, my quite blatant summings-up of men and women. Cocksure, if you like, I was, on this point at least: but cocksure only because I had at one time or another interviewed almost every distinguished man and woman in the great world of London, and watched them giving, over the microphone, their mostly dusty answers to the world. One after another, I had been thrilled to meet them, and my thrill at meeting new human beings remains: but I had watched so many of the great developed, so to speak, in these broadcasts, from the negative to the

positive, that I had acquired a fairly reliable judgement of the value of the film. And I knew, pretty well, how the film ought to look.

I hope, of course, that I wanted more than that. I did, I think – however much I debunked myself – see a Mission in Indian broadcasting. I believed, without analysing the belief too closely, that the spoken word, rightly handled, could perform miracles for a vast and illiterate country. Once get the ear of those masses, and pour into that ear the wisdom of its own great men, and what huge balance of sanity could not be thrown into the uneasy tilting scales of the world? In some such vaguery my thoughts ran. But to get the ear – that was the first, the crucial, point. Without that, all else failed. Therefore, of man's two great qualities, those of intellectual vision and emotional drive – and there are no others worth mentioning – I wanted, first, the latter. If I could find both in one man – the rarest thing in the world – so much the better: if not, I could for the time being – so I insanely and mistakenly thought – myself supply sufficient of the former. But, however blind I may have been to my own shortcomings, I had no doubts about my ability to recognize either quality or both, or the lack of them, within three seconds of meeting any man. And Mr Gog quite definitely had neither.

I wasn't, therefore, altogether at ease as I sat and drank coffee on the balcony of the Taj Mahal Hotel with Mr Gog and his brother, Magog. I felt positive that I wasn't behaving as a Director-General ought to behave. It was extremely hot: I wanted eggs and bacon, but dared not demand them, in case their consumption conflicted with some Indian usage. The Gogs, while gently probing me with obvious disfavour, left me the conversational ball: and I found it dangerous to roll. As a Director-General, I had to be omniscient: and as I knew very little about broadcasting, and just nothing about India, I felt not without reason that every phrase might betray me. In any case I knew, and I knew that they knew, that I was at war with the Gogs. Gog the elder had been selected, as I was later to learn from a Government file, because 'he has a large private income and seems just the man'. Magog was a shock to me: he had been selected only two days before my arrival by Belton, who was doing – in his own despite – a sort of John the Baptist for me. Gog was to go to the new Station at Delhi: Magog was to take his place in Bombay. All this without reference to me: I boiled

inwardly, and looked with rage upon the magnificent panorama of the bay.

Gog and Magog, I reflected, provided at least two reasons for the strange fact that Indian broadcasting, with a potential hundred million listeners, had in fact about fifteen thousand. A group of Indian business men, fired by the financial success of European broadcasting, had floated a company in 1927 and, with a too-meagre capital, built two weak little stations at Calcutta and Bombay. In the following three years they had gathered some seven thousand listeners and lost a great deal of money. They decided to go into liquidation. The Government of India, which then and later – with considerable wisdom – thought broadcasting a curse, was thereupon bullied by the vested interests of radio dealers to buy up the transmitters. Having done so, it proceeded, quite naturally, to economise: file-writers in Delhi could hardly be expected to sanction public expenditure on music, drama, and similar irrelevancies: it seemed obvious that all such frivolous waste should be avoided. The programmes accordingly deteriorated even from their former low standard: and Indian broadcasting would have spiralled down to complete eclipse had not the BBC, at the critical moment, started an Empire programme on the short wave. Europeans in India rushed to buy sets: and since the Government had, by way of strangling broadcasting altogether, put an import duty of fifty per cent on sets, even the eight thousand extra sets purchased brought quite a deal of money under the broadcasting head. The dealers cried that broadcasting's profits must be used for broadcasting: the Government replied with the offer of a new station at Delhi and a man – me – from the BBC. But, however much English residents of India listened to the BBC – and to the radio dealers it did not matter, then, who listened to what as long as sets were sold – Indian broadcasting remained what it had always been: and Gog and Magog were characteristic of it.

How characteristic I learned when we visited 'the Station'. This was housed on the top floor of a dingy building, the rest of which was given to offshoots of Post Office administration. A dilapidated lift wheezed and creaked us to the fifth floor, the ragged liftman unconscious of my eminence: arrived, and ready to assume Director-General-like dignities and condescensions, I was confronted with an empty, and exceedingly dirty and untidy room, some fifteen by twenty feet, cluttered with a medley of paper-strewn tables and bounded by a partition of wood and

glass. Percolating through this, I was in Gog's office, and out of it opened the eight by ten sanctum of the 'Directors of European and Indian programmes'. Beyond this was 'the Studio', a dark room hung with dirty cotton curtains of a peculiarly atrocious magenta, and furnished with a large grubby divan in pink and gold, a battered piano, and a harmonium. The atmosphere was that of a bankrupt brothel, and the noise of the street, no small assault on the ear-drums, rang and reverberated through it. In one corner a stuffy alcove housed an out-of-date gramophone turntable. My soul freezing within me may have caused a slight rise in my eyebrows, for Gog remarked carefully, and unnecessarily, that the staff were not yet here, but that they 'would arrive somewhere about ten'. He then put on a large pair of hornrimmed spectacles, seated his burly form at his desk, and proceeded to sort out letters. Magog, who in great contrast to his brother was a slim and epicene young man of a Bloomsbury type, meanwhile asked me if I would care to listen to some gramophone records: he had, he said, the largest collection - of course European - in Bombay. I said curtly no: but felt that Gog and Magog had undoubtedly won the first round.

I never could 'assert myself', and I didn't now. What I should have done I don't know: perhaps never gone to the studios until all the staff were assembled: perhaps pushed Gog out of his chair: perhaps - yes, alas, it was an infallible rule of India - shouted at him. I did nothing except take the chair opposite him, the chair, quite clearly, of a subordinate, and accept the letters which he handed to me. Among these was one from the Honourable Mr Mitchell, acting Minister of Industries and Labour in the absence of Sir Frank Noyce, which told me (a) that it 'would be wiser to say nothing to the press at this juncture' and (b) that 'he had thought it better to defer my visit to their Excellencies' and that I should, 'when I came to Simla, first stay with us.' This was infuriating: to have my careful press statement thus abruptly dismissed was bad enough: but to upset the invitation from the Willingdons, which I had moved heaven and earth to obtain, was a disaster. I had known vaguely that Indian broadcasting was disreputable and down-at-heel: and I had divined, not quite incorrectly, that the immediate homing of its new Controller to the Viceroy's House would raise its prestige: now, when the need had been reinforced by experience, I was defeated. The Military Secretary to the Viceroy, clearly unaware of Mr Mitchell's design, had also written to say that Their Excellencies would

expect me on the following Monday: should I ignore Mitchell and wire acceptance? Was it worth enraging the Department? Looking back, I think it probably was: I was destined to enrage them anyway: but, whether owing to the Gog and Magog, the studio, or the lack of a substantial breakfast I hadn't the courage.

And now the staff began to trickle in. First came Blenkinsop, the 'Director of European programmes'. As the Bombay station broadcast for some five hours a day, about an hour of which was devoted to 'European' programmes consisting mainly of gramophone records, his job was not arduous. Blenkinsop was pale and shrinking and slovenly, as well he might be on the beggarly wages he received: his hands were wet and shook like those of an old man. He was, I suppose, about thirty years old; he shocked me, because he was the first down-at-heel white man I saw in the East. Trembling, he poured out a tale of woe, to which I felt that the Gog and Magog, on the other side of the partition, were listening attentively. The burden of the story was that he, Blenkinsop, should be appointed Station Director; he had worked for ten hours a day for eight years, Magog knew nothing, and so on. Blenkinsop, given opportunities, was perhaps no fool: but fresh as I was from the BBC and infuriated by the look of the studios, I could only shrink from his complaints, and wonder what his 25,000 hours of work had been devoted to. Blenkinsop suffered by meeting me when I knew nothing of Indian conditions, and was moreover irritated by Gog and Magog: I wrote him off.

Next came Chakravarty, the 'Director of Indian programmes'. The trouble about Chakravarty, as far as I was concerned, was that his English was so thick and strange as to be almost unintelligible: and even had I been able to converse fluently in Hindustani it would have availed me nothing since he came from Gujerat. Chakravarty, even through the barrier of language, could be recognized as a trier: one of Nature's slaves, slow, willing, fated to be bullied. He had soft brown eyes in a round scared face: he conveyed to me, as best he could, the idea that although Gog and Magog were great people he, Chakravarty, would possibly make the best Station Director. From this awkward subject I endeavoured to wean his attention to programmes: so far as I could gather, they consisted of an unvarying rota of three or four singers and a couple of instrumentalists. Each artist performed for two, and even three, hours at a stretch, and had apparently done so for years. Chakravarty's mind obviously did not run to any interruption of the hallowed routine.

I passed out into the main office, and six weedy clerks rose wearily to their feet. Should I make a speech? Talk about the greatness of broadcasting? The nobility of their calling? How Gog and Magog would laugh behind their partition, if I did. I shook hands with Mr Gomez, the accountant, a dry little man with waxed mustaches and shifty eyes. I looked at his books, which were unintelligible to me. I knew that I ought to make some brilliant criticism or suggestion, and could think of nothing to say. The atmosphere round me was one that I had never encountered – the atmosphere of slavery. These people were interested neither in me nor in broadcasting: they wanted only to be left alone, to earn what they could, to do as little as possible for it. Mr Gomez, however, made it relatively plain, over a discussion of figures, that the proper person for the appointment of Station Director was an accountant. I retreated to Gog's office, and said I was ready to drive to the transmitter.

So far, so bad, I thought to myself in the car. I can make no impression on these people, and I dislike them all. Gog, with his fat face and body, his sly smile, his obvious grossness and utter ignorance, is no man for me or for broadcasting; yet here he is, a fixed constellation in my sky: what do I do with him? Magog, with his music and his effeminacy, is perhaps one better for broadcasting, but he will never keep order and nobody will respect him. Blenkinsop I don't trust: Chakravarty is incapable of original thought: the rest are not even capable typists. Where do I begin? How can broadcasting ever come to life under such people? As we flashed through the tree-shadowed avenues towards Worli, Gog and Magog pointed out this and that – the house of a millionaire, the Willingdon Club, the Race Course. India? Yes, I supposed, Europeanized India, of which Gog and Magog were evidently a part. But they could tell me little about the serried rows of tenements huddled under the smoke-stacks of Worli. Was that India? Yes, the India of the underpaid cotton operatives, poor relations of their contemporaries in Rochdale and Todmorden. And at the transmitter were two of their kindred: mechanics earning £2 a month. I was now an employer of sweated labour, no less. The transmitter was a replica of the old, out-of-date design of 210: that it still functioned seemed a miracle. Pannikar, the Station Engineer, handed me a petition: it said – and I knew without reading it that it said – that he, Pannikar, was the proper person to appoint as Station Director.

We drove on now towards Thana, some twenty-five miles out-

side the city, where Belton had proposed that a new transmitter should be erected. For me who knew nothing about transmitters, this was one more awkward problem, to which I could apply only common sense and cryptic utterances: I was vaguely against the whole idea, partly because I knew little about Belton, whose vague associations with India's dying broadcasting seemed half-hearted, and partly because such a project would involve large expenditure, and finance was going to be one of my most ticklish problems. Nor did there seem to be any great urgency about building powerful transmitters until programme and studio management had been drastically reorganised. The old transmitter was certainly out-of-date, but it did function: it was subject to interference, but twenty-five miles of cable might well prove a source of trouble as well as expense. As we drove along, therefore, I made up my mind that the Thana project should be delayed, and got a certain kick from having, if only in my own mind, decided something. The drive was enchanting enough: the warm golden air caressed us as we swept past glinting water-logged paddy-fields and village bazaars bright with colour, where sacred bulls with necklaces of turquoise blue wandered at will; and the whole landscape was aflame with the startling blossom of the gold-mohur, trees as high as elms flaunting a profusion of gold and crimson orchidaceous blooms.

Gradually the villages became more deeply embedded in the countryside; mud walls tanned by the sun to beige, shadowed by rustling palms, with rutted winding lanes which I longed to explore. Village women moved with superb elegance through the sunlight, the bright brass pots poised on their heads, gold and purple petticoats swinging with their stride. Beggars with long beards and emaciated legs, who might be sages for all I knew, sat about, and the lovely white oxen, with their melting eyes, pulled carts upon which gleaming black bodies, crowned with crimson turbans, slept or meditated in a golden trance.

'With these damned carts you can't get along at all,' grumbled Gog. Maybe. Did I want to get along? In this sleek car with Gog and Magog I was a million miles from India, just as I was a million miles from it in my capacity as a government-wallah. I wanted to get out and lose myself. But of course, I didn't. We very seldom have the courage to do what we want.

Soon we came among thicker trees and scrub, and the car bumped and panted over rough tracks, branches sweeping the roof with contempt and dislike. The jungle, I thought: lions,

tigers, leopards, snakes – no, after all, not so near Bombay, Actually in five years of India I never saw a lion, tiger, leopard or snake; and only twice an elephant. But at this moment I was romantically inclined, and when we finally lurched to rest in a hot green shade, I could think of nothing but the beauty of the trees.

‘The proposed site of the transmitter,’ said Gog, consulting a large map, on to which his forehead dripped beads of perspiration, ‘starts from that big tree over there, you see the red –’

‘Isn’t that hibiscus?’ I asked.

‘Hi *what?*’ said Gog, put out by this.

‘No, nothing,’ I replied quickly. ‘You were saying that the site started from that tree –’

‘And goes on up the slope to that sort of yellow bush – what?’

‘Nothing. Go on.’

‘And then down past that dead tree with the creeper and round that bit of open space –’

‘I’ll just get out and go over it. Give me the map.’

I took the map and charged into the jungle. If I follow the most prickly places, I thought, I will get away from Gog and Magog. But they are watching me: what ought I to do? Nobody at the BBC ever prepared me for this. If only I had some sort of *instrument*: something which buzzed or clicked. The hibiscus is a dream, and that jacaranda – I must look intently at the ground, as if I knew something about it – then scan the whole area, so . . . Yes, and I must take some time about it. Or not? I should rather like to sit down on this piece of lush grass, but I can’t think that an engineer would do that. If I have a garden, I shall plant a lot of jacaranda. . . but then, the whole thing is hopeless, I ought never to have come at all. Fool that I am, and damn Gog and Magog . . .

I returned, looking as thunderous as I could, and said: ‘I don’t think it’ll do at all.’

‘You wish to return to Bombay?’

‘Yes.’ (What on earth did he expect me to say?)

Almost immediately we lost our way. With interest and some surprise I noted – for I was new to the linguistic gaps of India – that Gog and Magog had considerable difficulties in understanding, and making themselves clear to, the locals. This was not encouraging to me. The language of those parts was presumably I thought, Gujarati: I didn’t understand a syllable. In England I had plodded through a whole Hindustani grammar, and knew by

heart every exercise in it: how much is it, I should like a bath now, bring me some tea, how is your grandfather? More, indeed much more, I had learned to read and write the printed Urdu script. But here in the Bombay area all this meant nothing at all. And even Gog and Magog, it seemed to me, were pretty well floored. This tower of Babel was not a promising place for radio.

We arrived back, eventually, at the echoing magnificence of the Taj Mahal Hotel. I said that I would send a telegram to Belton, and go to Delhi that night. Gog and Magog were horrified by this: they wished to give a party for me, champagne and an excellent dinner, they said, in the freezingly air-conditioned ballroom of the Taj. I thanked them, and supposed in a guilty way that I ought possibly to meet some more people: but the day had frightened me, and I was impatient to get on to Delhi and see what Fate had in store for me there. In any case, I felt that, in the moist heat, my dignity, intellect and wisdom as Controller of Broadcasting to the Government of India were ebbing through my pores. I was in no mood to face a dinner-party.

So I climbed on to that train which, proceeding quietly over some 2,000 miles, was known as the Frontier Mail. I had as yet no bearer – that personal servant who is indispensable in India – because I was suspicious, not quite incorrectly, of a bearer recommended by Gog and Magog: I thought he might spy upon me. This was only a vague kind of thought, a dim intuition: but had I known how much truth there was in it, I might have felt even more nervous than I did. As it was, I realized, on this first acquaintance with Indian trains, that a bearer was desirable. I was, so it turned out (and that almost never happened to me again) the only European traveller on the train. I had a roomy compartment, with two berths covered, like a Victorian horse-hair sofa, with particularly slippery upholstery, and a shower-bath leading off it. It seemed luxurious. Gog and Magog would not allow me to unroll my own valise, although I said that I was capable of doing so: they had brought along another young member of the staff, who did it for me. And after doing it he handed me, surreptitiously, an envelope.

The train pulled out. I waved to Gog and Magog and opened the envelope. It contained, and I knew that it contained, a plea that he, Hussain Ali, was the only person really suited to be Station Director of Bombay.

Some people used to enjoy railway journeys in India. In fact, to judge from the rarity with which the poor little air lines were used whilst I was there, the majority did. I didn't: though on this first occasion I expected nothing less. Crossing Romantic India, I said to myself: the wide lonely spaces: the Indian night. I peered out of the window into the Indian night: hot, stuffy, black. Not even a star. I stretched myself on the horsehair and slept. I awoke chewing dust, with the sun burning a hole in my head. Drawing the blind, I considered dust. I had never seen real dust before. It was not only in my mouth, it was in my hair and my ears and my nose, it was on the pillow and under the sheets, it lay like snow on the floor, it covered my hairbrushes and my towels and my sponge and my books and my clothes: it seemed to increase and multiply with every moment. Hastily I put myself under the shower and gratefully remained there for a few crystallizing minutes: then shook my bed and belongings, only to find that I had accumulated a positive icing of dust on my wet skin. I returned to the shower again. With a repeat of the process I became comparatively dust-free and looked out of the window. Crossing Romantic India. Never had I beheld an uglier landscape: flat, tired, naked earth stretching to flat horizon under a grey and heavy-clouded sky. The jungle? A Rajput castle? A tiger? Some ruins? Blue mountains? A little deer, perhaps - oh God, give me a little deer at least! No, no, said God, Hampstead Heath, but flat.

It went on like that.

We arrived at Delhi in the evening, and it was dark. I realized for the first time - and I never quite got used to it - that in India the sun sets punctually at six-thirty, more or less, all the year round: there are no long evenings and no short ones, a monotonous state of affairs. So Delhi drifted by me for the first time only in rain-mirrored winking lights, the empty spaces of the Ceremonial Station, and finally the sudden bustle and clamour of the terminus. I stood in the doorway and a voice under a topee said:

'Fielden?'

'Yes?'

'Belton.'

I got down. We shook hands. He said nothing more. A coolie was removing my baggage. The station was full of noise, tremendous noise, and bustling human figures in all manner of dress

and undress, and behind it all was the swish of heavy rain which gleamed in the arc lights and spouted from the carriage roofs.

'That's all your luggage?' shouted Belton.

'Think so,' I yelled.

'Come on, then.'

I thought, really, I doubt if this is the way a Controller of Broadcasting should be received, however I must be patient. (Conditioned and controlled.) I followed. We clambered into an antique, weather-screened Ford. My luggage, in which I had lost all interest, seemed to have disappeared. We drove off through sheets of rain, which banged and rattled on the canvas screens. Puddles in red earth spouted up in the headlights. The engine wheezed and spluttered.

'Blast!' said Belton, above the noise, as the car skidded. And then, suddenly, he shouted in my ear – 'I suppose you *know* that you've come to the most God-awful country in the world?'

'It certainly seems wet now,' I bellowed, 'but why God-awful?'

'Because,' bawled Belton, 'you can't get a thing . . .' the rattling of the side-curtains carried his voice away, and it came to me only in gusts . . . 'think you're coming to put everything . . . not a thing, I tell you . . . blue-eyed boy at first . . . frustration, madness . . . not a thing *done*.' He seemed to relapse into silence, though I fancied that he was still muttering. The car drew up on some wet gravel: the shape of white modern buildings was dimly discernible.

'*Boooy!*' yelled Belton through the dripping darkness. White blowzy figures scuttered softly. Belton got down, slamming the door, and I followed him, squelching, round the edge of a dim building and then through gauze doors into a large, empty, absolutely featureless room, in which, round the single bulb that glared from the ceiling, a strange cloud of insects danced.

'Do for you, I suppose?' said Belton, and I caught the implication that I supposed myself too high and mighty for such a room, which, of course, was true.

'Excellent,' I murmured, thinking how much I hated camp beds. 'Where am I?'

'Oh,' said Belton. 'This is the club. Sorry, thought you'd know. Nobody much in Delhi this time of year. Find yourself a house, no doubt, though they're damned difficult to get, I may tell you. Anyhow you're due to go up to Simla tomorrow night to stay with the Mitchells. I shall take you, of course.'

Everything, I thought is a mad rage, is being arranged for me.

Regardless of any wishes I might have. Why the devil am I so weak in accepting it all?

'You'll be able,' pursued Belton, throwing a brief Hindustani execration at the 'boy' (aged about sixty) who was unfolding my camp bed, 'to see the studios tomorrow. I've taken a house. Hope it'll do. Couldn't delay longer.'

Anger bubbled up in me. The damned interference of the man! The studios for the new Delhi station were *my* affair, and I had my own ideas about them. And now a house had been taken . . .

'I'll get rid of it if it's unsuitable,' I replied in a flat voice.

'Probably won't find another if you do,' retorted Belton. 'You don't know Delhi. Which of these bearers do you want? They've both got good references.'

Two aged figures swathed in white bowed and tottered before me. With clasped hands and eyes lifted to the rainy skies above the roof, each assured me that I was, most inexplicably, his father and mother, and that to me his life's devotion was assured. Both were hateful. Had I not pictured to myself something so vastly different? Slim, intelligent youths, with the eyes of gazelles, worshipping me with silent, but so effective, service? What had I to do with these old monsters? But I was too tired to argue. I said 'That one'll do.'

'His name,' said Belton, 'is Khuda Baksh. You'd better look at his papers.'

'I absolutely can't,' I replied, 'look at any papers.'

And Khuda Baksh, whom I never ceased to dislike, started, there and then, to remain with me for five long years. So much for will-power and decision.

I found myself, next morning (after Khuda Baksh had, to my unspeakable horror, made the most violent but unavailing attempts to bath, dry and dress me) at a breakfast table with six lightly-clad sweating gentlemen, each reading with deadly concentration a newspaper, periodical or magazine. The atmosphere was one of excruciating surliness. I felt a spasm of laughter welling up inside me, though I wondered too, whether Delhi hot weather would reduce me to the same condition. I need not have wondered. It did.

Mr Belton then drove me to the transmitter. The sky was blue, though heavy clouds rolled on the horizon: damp tremendous heat enveloped us. As from a Turkish bath, I stared in growing wonder at New Delhi, that thirty-million-pound monument to British grandeur which looks like the immaculate conception of

a frozen suburb. Whitely down the straight, straight roads gleamed the bungalows of A, B or C variety according to your station and salary: whitely gleamed the fence-posts of the circle from which five white straight roads led each to another circle from which five white straight roads . . .

'I can't imagine how you find your way *at all*,' I said to Belton.

'This is Princes Place, and there are the Secretariats,' replied Belton. 'You'll soon get used to it.'

Exactly, I thought, what Russia would like to be. Whitely gleamed the statues of past Viceroys, meditative white heads rising from white robes. Whitely gleamed the meretricious domes of the Secretariats: and away away, characterless, featureless, almost limitless it seemed, flowed the Kings Way, ending only in a distant stumpy elephant which was the Arch of Victory. Whitely gleamed the great pillared roundabout, so like a gasometer (and always thus known) which was the Assembly House.

But then, through a long white vista, abruptly came something of a very different age and order – the three great pearly bubbles of the domes of the Great Mosque, a sight to uplift the heart.

*These are thy wonders, Lord of Power,
Killing and quickening, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour:
Making a chiming of a passing bell.
We said amiss
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell . . .*

Am I, I asked myself, spelling badly, as we bumped and banged along the now mercifully curving and not-so-good road between the fairy-like ethereal grace of the Jama Masjid and the beautifully severe lines of the Old Fort, poised above the hazy reaches of the Jumna? These at least are products of human hearts and hopes; not of A, B, or C engineers: and for the India which could build them I felt, for the first time, an entirely natural friendliness and admiration.

We jolted through the gates of Old Delhi, along the wide untidy streets where, in the dust strips before the houses, all manner of delightful untidy conversation pieces, cooking, squabbling and games were going forward, through the cantonment, where weddingcake architecture and greater decorum prevailed, and so

along flat empty roads to the transmitter. This, I was glad to observe, was in a frightful mess. I had no desire to be forced into a sudden opening of a brand-new station with staff not as yet recruited. I listened without any regret to the sad stories of the Marconi engineer – red tape with the Public Works Department, impossible to complete the approach (which was a mass of rocks and rubbish), gear unprotected from the rain, the Posts and Telegraphs Department unaccountably slow . . . Belton interrupted, talked technically: the Marconi engineer shouted, I looked blank. I was calculating that I should have at least six weeks to recruit and train a staff, fit up studios. But six weeks only!

Bumping back to the studio, Belton informed me that he had already advertised for staff ('couldn't delay longer') for the new station. My hackles rose through my aertex shirt. How many, I enquired.

'Oh, well,' said Belton airily, 'I decided that three would do for the station and three for the transmitter. Like Calcutta and Bombay, you know.'

'And at what pay?' I queried, trying to sound as though I really believed that three people could run a daily broadcast programme *in toto*.

'Oh, usual rates, you know,' replied Belton. 'Let's see, the Programme Director would get two hundred rupees – that's £14 a month – and the assistants sixty – that's about £5 – a month. Quite good pay for Indians.'

'But not, surely, for brains or originality?' I suggested.

'Well, of course, you can try to get them put up. You'll see, you won't. Government of India scales. Anyway, they're quite attractive enough. I've got six thousand applications already.'

'Six thousand?' I gasped. I felt like rolling over into the back seat and yowling like a scalded cat. 'Six thousand?'

'Yes – I'm going to hand them over to you,' said Belton. A flicker of a grey eye through spectacles came round at me: he had scored. 'You'll have to go through them, I suppose.'

'But,' I ventured, cowed, 'don't I have a clerical staff *at all*?''

'Oh, yes. There's Rashid Ali and a few clerks at Headquarters, wherever you *do* make your Headquarters. They're at Simla now. But you couldn't trust *them* with applications.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Oh, my dear fellow, a Muslim would choose nothing but Muslims, a Hindu Hindus, and so on. You have to keep an eye on communal representation. Have to explain that to you. Besides,

they'd choose their own brothers and sons and nephews - God knows where you'd be. Anyhow, here's the studio.'

I perceived, in a daze, that we had arrived at the portal of a undersize and peculiarly hideous wedding-cake. It was a bungalow wedding-cake, but that did not prevent it from having thrown out stalagmite-crowned turrets with gothic windows of coloured glass, and a crenellated portico of plaster. A derelict garden - in India correctly called 'a compound' - lay gasping around it. I followed Belton through a high small hall, which smelt like a tenement, into a central room - the largest, obviously of the bungalow: indeed you might say the whole bungalow reft of its turretries.

'Used to belong to the Maharajah of Bumph,' said Belton, complacently surveying the impossible room. 'Rather a lot of bathrooms, I'm afraid: otherwise not bad. Not bad at all.'

I sat down in the middle of the floor and contemplated the solar-plexus of my beautiful new broadcasting organisation. It was about thirty feet long, at least thirty feet high (with a painful addition of coloured clerestory windows) and about twelve foot broad. It echoed like a tomb. No orchestra could fit into it, no singer could sing in it, no talker talk: it was inconceivable that it could be applied to broadcasting. I thought of England, Home, Beauty, and the BBC. Belton said:

'Here is Boshi, the Station Engineer.'

A plump figure with a brown, flat, penny-like face, came waddling up to me and bowed profoundly. He was wearing khaki shirt and shorts, and between them an enormously wide white leather belt to which multitudinous medallions and hieroglyphs were attached. Bowing over me, he purred: 'It iss my prout honour to welcome to the studios our incomparable leader.'

I wondered if I had heard that correctly. But the purr continued: 'We haff been as a sheep without a rudder. You, sirr, haff come as a saviour to uss.'

Belton had wandered out into the garden. I said, feebly: 'Well . . . do you suppose we *can* broadcast from this studio?'

'Sirr? Undoubtedly we shall broadcast gr-r-reat things from this studio. We need perhaps some curr-r-rtains, yess' . . . But we haff other studios . . .'

Deferentially - what a perfect butler! - he led me into bathroom after bathroom, octagonal, hexagonal, turretted, blue-windowed. Not bathrooms in the Ritz sense, no: rooms, merely, where a bath might be put upon a cement floor, to be filled from

a tap and emptied into a hole. Bathrooms in which the human voice echoed and re-echoed. Something, I decided, must be done to Belton about this: a plot began to spin in my mind. Also getting the measure of Mr Boshi, I said: 'I see that you are very experienced in broadcasting.'

The penny expanded into smiles.

'Sir-r-r, with the sole exception of Mister Istapleton, I am the oldest member of the Indian S-S-State Broadcasting Service.'

'And undoubtedly,' I said, casting discretion to the winds, 'you will do it great honour.'

The penny became serious.

'Sir-r-r, I have a s-s-small communication to make to your Honour.'

From below the belt he produced a letter addressed to me. Too well did I know what that letter contained. I shook him warmly and wetly by the hand and hurried into the garden.

'Well!' I exclaimed, smiling like a Cheshire cat, 'that's all splendid! I'm most grateful! And now, can't I make some amends for all your trouble by giving you some lunch?'

The face of Belton went through a series of phases. It fell, looked doubtful, sneered, rose, and finally beamed.

'Glad you're pleased. Yes, it *is* about tiffin-time. Where would you like to go?'

'You're the expert. Where can we eat and drink most effectively?'

On the way, I spoke of alcohol with appreciation and respect, and discovered in Belton a taste for white wine. Over lunch therefore I plied him with the best that the hotel could produce, carefully filling his glass while he looked elsewhere, so that the desired explosion came as I anticipated. Looking darkly across the dessert, Belton shot suddenly at me: 'D'you know *why* you've been invited to Vishregal Lodge? Because you've been to *Eton*, tash why, thash *all* -'

'Not at all,' I retorted. 'It's because I intrigued to get there.'

But that wouldn't do. Belton was off and wasn't going to listen to me.

'*You* know *noshing* about broadcasting! Anyone can shее *that*! And let me tell you, you're not *wanted* in India, not *wanted*! I *know*. Do *you* know,' he hissed across the table, 'do *you* know that the Govment of India *wrote* to Shtectary of Shtate shaying *reconshidered* decishion, didn't *want*•you. Shtectary of Shtate

shaid contract shigned, noshing to do . . . Yesh, and you wont lasht a year, not a *year* . . .’

His voice went on. It was funny, comic, horrible, revolting. It was probably true, Belton had maybe wanted the job, probably deserved it: between me and the Government of India I knew there could be only rage. I looked out at the swimming-pool and the trees, felt unutterably sad, ordered oceans of black coffee.

Belton, getting into his car, said: ‘Afraid I’ve talked awfully stupidly. I always,’ he added grinding the gears, ‘say damn silly things. Sorry.’

He was disarming, and after all, I thought, likeable. But looking out on British India, I did not feel excessively exultant.

The train, bumping through the night across dusty plains, deposited you at Ambala at four in the morning. You could then whisk out of your carriage and catch – with a minimum of time to spare – the first Diesel rail-car which took you to Simla by hairpin bends over boiling precipices on a line which seemed too narrow for a nursery train. Or again you could sleep a little more in the heat and clangour of Ambala station and catch the second rail-car. Or again you might sleep still more and take a taxi, though that, on the curling roads, made some people sick. I should have preferred the first or third course: Belton firmly imposed the second. This, he said, before disappearing into the station lavatory, was due to the fact that (a) his bowels must work regularly and couldn’t be hurried and (b) the taxis charged too much. My own bowels, I knew, had no intention whatsoever of working in such circumstances, and as I was being paid £2,000 a year, a perfectly dizzy income for me, I didn’t care a damn about expense.

However, the second rail-car it was: and we curled and curved over dizzy and dizzier ravines, through hosts of chattering grey monkeys – but not a flower to be seen – until the mountains stretched endlessly below us, contour after contour, identical, lifeless, barren, ugly – reminding me a little, though less colourfully, of the illimitable ranges which spread below Madrid.

Belton, now solicitous, warned me: ‘You must be careful. Very careful. 8,000 feet plays the devil with the heart. Don’t walk too fast. You’ll probably faint.’

He went on with this until I felt myself distinctly growing paler, and heard the wheels repeating ‘Probably faint, probably faint, probably – probably faint . . .’ And so, when I beheld a hill

in front of me after descending at Simla station (the rickshaws with their human ponies I could not face) I walked with such idiotic slowness that I must have appeared to be ninety. 'Am I fainting?' I asked myself. 'How do I feel?' After a bit myself said, 'Personally, I feel bully: what's wrong?' So I walked a little faster. Admittedly the way was steep, and admittedly I (resentfully) puffed and blew. But faint, no. I rather wished that I *could* faint. Simla frightened me.

After the station hill came a long straight road, the backbone of Simla, and the backbone, for that matter, of the hill upon which it was perched. It was an awkward backbone, like that of a goat, shelving away quickly, and allowing only a precarious straggle of houses along its brim. One of these was the Hotel Cecil, centre (though I didn't yet know it) of the political or amorous intrigue of which the Government of India was chiefly composed. Past this rackety building, which looked as though it might slide at any moment into the abyss (but in which, by diabolical ingenuity, the builder had contrived to make a lounge without any view whatsoever) slid rickshaws innumerable, pulled by panting natives dressed in the liveries of a vulgar Venice. In the rickshaws (which, when I came to look at them, were simply bath-chairs uptilted) reclined elderly gentlemen with massive paunches, cigars, and white topees, assiduously reading documents or nodding with distant dignity to a passing acquaintance. The rickshaw-wallahs, except for their sweating brown faces and tired, flat, brown feet were costumed in blue and scarlet, green and purple, violet and gold, and exceedingly bad taste. I smelt not quite Huntingshire and not quite Suburbia, but an uneasy mixture of both. Snobbery rampant, taste couchant, in a field azure, crossed with Decorations.

Up, up, up we went through the trees, the mountains dropping to our ascent, until puffing and perspiring we reached our goal - Inverarm. Inverarm, a black-and-white monstrosity in the Tudor style, with a red corrugated-iron roof. Here lived the Mitchells: here would live the Noyces, the Stewarts, the Clows, my successive presiding genii: here I was destined to have endless quarrels, embitterments, disillusiones, and boredom in excelsis.

But the Mitchells, on this one occasion when I visited them, were charming. They, about to retire, had no stake in my future and thus no anxieties about my character. With them, after a pleasant lustreless evening I arranged to go to Viceregal Lodge next day. I wanted, badly, to get there. I was terrified of going

there, because mutual friends had told me that Lady Willingdon was a Dragon, who would impose the sternest of conventions on her guests, and that life at Viceregal Lodge was a continual slavery. But, if I couldn't get the ear of the Viceroy, I was done for. I felt sure that, under a benignant Viceregal eye, Indian broadcasting could begin to flourish: without it, never.

So, feeling absurd as well as nervous, I was pulled in the Mitchell rickshaw under the Viceregal Gate House, where the Indian guard (magnificent, it must be said) came with a great clank of arms to the salute of my nervous person. Up the drive we went, I anxiously consulting my watch, through hordes of grey monkeys which hardly bothered to move to make way for us. And then I was getting down, flustered (my tie? this suit? my hair?) at the portico of a Very Large Wimbledon Villa, and being taken by an ADC (witheringly polite) across a galleried hall, and into a loggia where a party sat.

And instantly it was quite all right. I made my little bows without difficulty. The Vicereine made none of the anticipated comments on my appearance. Instead, I felt perfectly at home. I knew in a flash that the Willingdons were charming and I couldn't fail to get on with them. I knew that she was dominating, a human dynamo if ever there was one, but I also knew that she could be knocked off her perch very easily by words. I knew that Lord Willingdon was genial, kind and sympathetic: there, I thought – and thought rightly – I shall have a friend. I was enormously elated.

We all strolled out into the garden in the sunset. It was one of the perfect Simla evenings which are rare. Behind us, towering into the deep blue sky, the snows of the Himalayas brooded: in front, the immense dropping contours of the hills, purple and violet and blue, disclosed the distant plain and a curving gleam of the river. Stars began to glitter. Lady Willingdon said: 'Come, come! Lost in dreams? But you've got a lot to do! Can't afford to dream here, y'know! Now I'll show you the rose garden while there's still some light!'

She took me firmly by the arm.

But I was glimpsing the long silly road of the future: the miles of paper that I should cover with hopeless arguments: the endless recruitment of unsatisfactory personnel: the quarrels and frustrations, the growing languor and indifference: the hatred of Indian and Englishman alike: Mr Gandhi saying '... if you choose to keep your job by virtue of the guns behind you': the slow build-

ing of stations and the ignorant fight with language and music and habit: and at last the dim departure, no trumpets sounding, into the muggy clouds of war . . .

But the rose garden was beautiful.

English literature and English anecdote have been considerably weighted, in the last century and a half, by Indiana. I do not propose to add very much to that burden. No Poonah stories, I hope, will be retold here. None of us, however, can entirely escape the mould of our times. Whether we are sociological or political or scientific or artistic or agricultural, we have to take up the pattern of human life, of progress or regress, discovery and research, at the point where it exists on the loom when we sit down to it. We can alter the pattern only slowly: the carpet goes on growing, much the same, even through revolutions. We cannot change what is already done. When I (or anyone at that time) went to India, I could not make a mental exclusion of events and trends. And because I was new to, and ignorant of, India, such trends and events probably made more impact on me than they could to those who had spent long years either in India itself, or in the services in England which controlled it. I did not think of India as a permanent vassal of the British Raj, and I thought the British Raj rather Kiplingesquely ridiculous: on the other hand, I did not think of India as independent, and I supposed the British Raj to be in some ways grand and glorious. I had a muddled but somewhat glamorous picture. The foregoing pages will have shown, I trust, that my expectations in this respect were not entirely fulfilled.

Among events and trends, the first was the menace of war. Nobody could doubt, in 1935, that the pathway to war was open. Therefore the planning of a radio network for India had, willy-nilly, a strategic note. It was for this reason (to take one example) that I decided to link stations - I had learnt this from Italy - not by telephone cables, as in Britain, but by a system of relay transmitters and receiving stations, which could operate and modify a series of wave lengths, free from any sabotage.

Second came the change of influence in India - a change to which the Indian Civil Service chose to remain blind, but which was apparent to any newcomer. The quality of the British was deteriorating: the quality of Indians was improving. It could not be otherwise. The Indian Civil Service had once been a coveted career; younger sons of the nobility had gone into it, and, even if

they had behaved atrociously, been drunk, had their Indian mistresses, embezzled funds, and died young, they had seemed, to the Indian minds of the time, glamorous, damnable, and lively. In their place, by 1935, we had the younger sons of Clapham and Surbiton, plus their suburban wives. And at the same time Indians, educated now in the universities of England, America, Germany and Japan, no longer regarded the English as supermen, even in a damnable sense. They thought them merely ignorant. Moreover, India was now wide open to new currents of thought flowing from Russia and Germany. These were the trends which threw the shadow of extinction over the British Raj. I have often been accused, in later years, of 'siding' with Indians, or 'being disloyal' to the British Raj. Neither was true. I came as a new boy to India, and the situation was clear. We had to do better, or get out.

And there was a third trend. The British, always paying lip-service to self-government (though seldom at the right time or with the right proposals) had invented the 1935 Act, which gave some measure of autonomy, but too little and too late. Compromise, as usual, muddled the picture. The Indian Civil Service, shadowed for the first time by the threat of unemployment, became more rigid and more obstinate: Indian nationalists, seeing the glimmer of independence, grew intransigent and wild. In the middle sat the Indian collaborationists or quislings (I don't think the name is unjust) who hoped that temporary subservience might earn them, in the end, high tyranny. The political weather in India, however you might look at it, was not promising.

That was the Indian end. The English end was – at least for me – even less attractive. England in the thirties had seemed to be stepping downhill, with a decline of enterprise and inspiration, and a growing class hatred. Mr Baldwin was whimpering of safety first, and Britain seemed to like that whimper. As a contrast the totalitarian countries, however thin and ugly their façade, gave an impression of liveliness and decision. People may deny, nowadays, that they felt like that, but it was a common feeling nonetheless. I myself had a special anger against the BBC pudding and its ways: this had grown out of personal experience in cases too numerous to be mentioned here. But I will mention two. In the early thirties the BBC, like any other group or organisation, had been preoccupied by unemployment. The BBC staff had been, I think, exceptionally generous with their money and time, and had run an unemployment centre at Gateshead.

Much effort had gone into programmes that might help. I devised a series which could, I believe, have much reduced the growing discontent. Many people were interested, including Edward, Prince of Wales - always quick in human sympathy. But the Labour Party stamped on it: and I had the clear impression, not only that the BBC would never fight in a good cause, but that Labour wanted and prayed for a split in English opinion, as they do today. That indeed may be good party politics: I began from that time, and have continued, to believe that party politics are due for the scrap heap.

My second quarrel, which left a permanent scar on my mind, was and must remain concealed in the virtue - or vice - of our social attitude and laws of libel. I can say only that it dealt with the effect of advertising upon truth. Few people, even today, realize to what monstrous lengths our huge advertisement concerns can go in their struggle against truth. 'Publish that article, and we stop your revenue!' Newspapers, after all, in the majority of cases, could not exist without their advertising revenue. And advertisement is nearly always exaggerated, false, and misleading. We all really *know* this: does anyone seriously believe that those yellow old tusks will become white as driven snow by the application of Hoodlum's Toothpaste, or that that muddy old skin will become roses and jasmine after a dose of Laxative B.?

I had imagined that the BBC, which did not depend on advertisement, would be immune to these influences. I was wrong. The revenue from advertisement in BBC publications was so colossal that it could not, or would not, be ignored. And it did, on occasion, seriously impinge on programmes. That is to say, we were prevented (and it is still the case) from attacking or even criticizing a product which experts had condemned. This so enraged me, and made me rage, that High Authority eventually sent me a memorandum pointing out that, if I wished advertisers to cancel their contracts, my Talks budget would be severely curtailed. I replied that I would rather have no talks at all. Exaggeration was perhaps my middle name: but I still rage against advertising: and wonder why it is allowed, tax-free, to stain men's minds, and the countryside, with its vulgar lies. The BBC could have blown the advertisement racket wide open, and it didn't. If it had, there might be no commercial television today. I am bound to admit that the BBC, if pusillanimous when it came to a fight, was and is a thousand times better than the commercial horrors people gape at now. Dear Sidney Bernstein,

I like him immensely, he is a first rate showman and does a fine job: but no, no, a thousand times NO: to dazzle people with unnecessary luxuries in the name of art or entertainment is harmful. In those days, of course, we were far from commercial radio: all the same, I was not inclined to model my Indian puzzle on the lines of the BBC.

The five years which I spent in India were, undoubtedly, the loneliest years of my life. The ache of loneliness was with me always. On the one hand there was the conglomeration of English officials and their wives – the most ignorant, insensitive, arrogant, and stupid conglomeration that the world has ever produced. During my first winter in Delhi, I went out to dinner with them almost every night. It was a terrible experience. Not only were their houses and furniture identical – they were built and supplied to the same pattern – but also the food, the guests, and the conversation were identical. There were always twelve people, and usually the same twelve. The dinner was always thin soup, wet fish, tasteless beef, and caramel custard. Since you were forced by etiquette to sit in an order determined by your salary, you sat almost always next to the same people. And, of course, you wore full evening dress. Very soon, I wanted to scream. The extraordinary thing was that any human being could stand it. Not a book was read, or owned, in those trim, respectable bungalows: not a play had been seen: not a note of music was known: never was there even an echo of real laughter. In the similar roads with similar lamp-posts and similar gates, it was as though one was shut up with a crowd of actors in an out-dated pageant, a dusty fusty representation of Versailles, with occasional struts before a distant sullen audience, inattentive and unknown. It was a sad spectacle of third-rate tyranny.

If this was (as it struck me) the English side, the Indian one, from which one might have expected more help and gaiety, was even more inscrutable and opaque. Indians saw in me (especially when I went out to dinner so much) just another stiff-necked British official. Why should an Englishman (and why indeed, I echoed) run their broadcasting? My efforts to be courteous were regarded as cunning: my attempts to speak Urdu and eat Indian food were a sly form of hypocrisy. The CID sent me a packet of intercepted letters from Indians, in which it appeared that (a) I knew nothing of broadcasting and had never had anything to do with it, (b) that I was a close relative of Mr Baldwin, and that was how I had got the job, and (c) that the BBC had sent me to

India because medium-wave transmitters were now out-of-date, and they hoped that I could sell off their old ones to the Indians. I was incensed by the idea of intercepted letters, and returned them to the CID, saying that they should cease sending them to me: but the poison did its work. I felt that I was up against a stone wall of misunderstanding, on which I might knock my head in vain.

These were the broad lines of discouragement. Of course there were exceptions, and very happy ones. Chancellor of the Exchequer (in Indian parlance Finance Member) was P. J. Grigg: and with him and his wife Gertrude I found an instant bond of sympathy, and a warm friendship which has never, and will never, grow dim. P.J. has one of the most piercingly brilliant brains that Nature ever made: he is unafraid, angry, violent, and devastatingly honest: and, in spite of all that, a man of modesty and humility, capable of great compassion. Gertrude, in her different way, is no less of an individual. These two might have been sent to me by God: I think I should have run away from India without them. That did not mean that we did not quarrel like three cats: they thought that India needed a rod of iron, and I didn't. But we recognized each other's point of view and respected it. At moments suicidal, I could run to the Griggs and be assured, not of agreement, but of warm and happy argument with underlying sympathy. Of all the English houses in Delhi or Simla or Madras or Calcutta or Bombay, the Griggs' was the only one in which I could feel unbuttoned and at home.

There were also the Willingdons. If I say that Willingdon was a good and perceptive Viceroy, Linlithgow the worst disaster that ever struck India and Micky Brabourne (removed by untimely death) the most promising Viceroy of his times, I am merely stating a view which resulted from my personal contact with all three. They were good or bad, that is to say, as far as I and broadcasting were concerned. Of other matters I have scant knowledge. Willingdon was a man who combined great natural dignity with an easy manner and a sense of fun. I can't imagine anyone – not even nationalist Indians – disliking him personally. He was keen on the possibilities of broadcasting and approved my plans for it. I had an entrée to the Viceroy's house at any hour. If (as frequently happened) I asked him to help me about something, he would tell me of the difficulties in detail, and then go about the business with infinite tact. When he failed (as he quite often did, for red tape was sometimes too much even for

Viceroy) he would put his head in his hands and say, 'My dear boy, I'm afraid I have let you down: we must try again.' Lady Willingdon liked me for different reasons: she liked anything new, and anybody who made the fur fly. In these two I had a cosy last resort, which was an immense help in my first six months, which were also their last in India. The Government of India soon got wise to this private line – so to speak – between me and the Willingdons, and when Linlithgow arrived, he was requested never to see me unless a Minister was present: a piece of advice which he decided, not I suppose unnaturally, to accept. Lord Brabourne, on the contrary, who was Governor of Bombay and then of Bengal, and the obvious selection for the next Viceroy, was completely sold on the idea, and my ideas, of a great extension of broadcasting, and through some uncomfortable years I visualized an end to all my troubles when he came to Delhi. But he died in Calcutta. Had he not done so, I believe that the history of Anglo-Indian relations would have been a very different, and much happier one, and I doubt whether Pakistan would ever, with its attendant massacres, have been created. It was a death which altered an Empire.

There were exceptions, too, on the Indian side. Dr Ansari, the forerunner of Mr Jinnah, was a man of exceptional charm, wisdom, tolerance and goodwill. Like Willingdon, he was born to be loved. He gave me a warm welcome, and I found in his house a fount of instruction about Indian ways and thoughts. Unluckily for me, he died suddenly about two months after I arrived in India. But fortunately, I gravitated from his house to that of his lieutenant, Asaf Ali. Asaf Ali, a Muslim of course, had married (a rare occurrence in India) a Hindu, Aruna, who (as I write) is Mayor of Delhi. These two showed me great kindness, and although I thought Asaf Ali rather a weak man, and Aruna far too extremist and fanatical, I spent many very happy evenings with them. They also introduced me to Sarojini Naidu, who became, for a time, a fast friend. Sarojini was the poetess of India, and no mean one. She was fat and ungainly, and looked like a benignant frog. That did not matter at all. Her enormous warm sympathy and her unquenchable sense of fun flowed over you like a warm bath. She was the best woman speaker – with the possible exception of Annie Besant – that I have ever heard. Perhaps for best I should substitute the most magnetic: it was quite difficult to remember, in both cases, exactly what had been said, but while they were speaking, they held you entranced. Evenings

at the Asaf Ali's were different from those with English officials. The food was attractive and surprising (with a good deal of laughter at my reactions to it), the conversation was uninhibited and gay, and after dinner one sat on the roof and watched the pigeons. This Indian game is great fun. You send up your flock of pigeons into the evening sky, and the game is to see how many of other people's pigeons they can lure back with them, or, of course, how many you lose. The pigeons wheeling against the calm sky make an entrancing pattern, and the excitement, when your eyes are quick, is as good as that of a racecourse, and much more subtle. I enjoyed those evenings.

Also, there was Gandhi, and there were my Station Directors. But those came later.

The winter in Delhi, as anyone who has experienced a Delhi winter knows, was a miracle of perfect weather. June days, September evenings, and all the flowers on earth.

My first job was to scrutinise the 6,000 applications for jobs. This was one of the most baffling tasks I have ever attempted. For they were all the same. The Government of India had laid down a sort of formula for applications – or perhaps one should say, implied it. Each letter started with the words 'I am a young man of active habits'. It went on to say that the young man had been to such-and-such a university, and had emerged with a degree, or (ancient but true joke) as a 'failed BA'. It then stated that the young man's father 'had fought for the British Raj in 1914' and that his grandfather 'had fought for the British in the Mutiny'. And he was, yours obediently. Poor youth of India! I was saddened by these letters. What could I do, when broadcasting was in question? I could only strive to pick out a phrase or a signature which had some individuality. In this way I chose some 300 applications – all, and more than all that one could interview for twelve jobs – and put them aside. Then I had to re-check them, in order to be sure that they contained the requisite communal proportions of Hindus, Muslims, and Anglo-Indians. Had I not done this, I should have instantly been accused of favouritism, and questions would have been asked in the Assembly. These things being accomplished, I had to convene a Selection Board: no one official in India could make appointments: they had to be made by a Committee, and to that Committee were attached the same rules – communal percentage of Hindus, Muslims, and Anglo-Indians, plus a Member of the Assembly.

Daft, do you say? It was daft all right. I approached the Government of India for advice about the Selection Board. They looked down their noses and said that they could not advise me: it was entirely a matter for the Head of the Department. I said that I knew no one in India. They said that that could not be helped. After a time, partly with the help of the Asaf 'Alis and Mrs Naidu, partly with the assistance of letters from England from E. M. Forster and others, I got a Board together. It included A. S. Bokhari, a Professor at Lahore University, who was destined to play a considerable part in my Indian scene.

One day I went to a party at the Willingdon's attended by Emerson, the Governor of the Punjab, and his ADC, Walter Skrine. Talking to Skrine, I voiced my bewilderment over the applications, and my fears that to train a broadcasting staff would be a long and difficult task in a country where the theatre hardly existed, and few books were read. He told me that he knew an Indian who was employed in the Army Headquarters at Simla as an examiner in languages: a very intelligent fellow, he said, who had produced plays and even written them, as well as a good deal of verse, with great success. 'I should think,' he added, 'that he would be exactly your man.' I took the name and said I would send him an invitation to attend the Selection Board. The name was Zulfaqar Bokhari. The first name stuck in my mind because it was unusual: but I did not connect him with Professor Bokhari of Lahore, since I was in a fair muddle about Indian names, and trying to get myself to slip round such tongue-twisters as Vijayaravagacharya, Rajagopalachari, and Ramaswami Iyer. Zulfaqar wrote to acknowledge my card, but said that he was well-suited to Army Headquarters and had no interest in broadcasting. I was slightly ruffled by this, and wrote him a letter telling him that he was an ass if he did not at least try, since broadcasting was bound to lead to positions and salaries of distinction. This brought him down to see me. I was staying at the Hotel Cecil in Delhi, and when he arrived was typing (it was ferociously hot) dressed in a bathing slip and nothing else. He recoiled on seeing me. I thought that perhaps he was embarrassed, so I told him to go away, and to come back later and have lunch with me. In later years he told me that it was not only the first time he had ever seen an Englishman in, so to speak, undress uniform, but it was also (and he had been for ten years in Army Headquarters) the first time that an Englishman had asked him to a meal. Over lunch I teased him a bit, and came to the con-

clusion that he was very much what was wanted: I persuaded him to put down his name for the Selection Board. When he arrived at the office, Gog, who was presiding over the arrangements there, rang me up and said that Bokhari was entirely unsuitable for broadcasting, and would create havoc. I said that havoc was what I most desired. Thus Zulfaqar started his long career. And some havoc there was. Later he became Director General of Radio Pakistan.

I now began to 'tour'. This 'touring' was a comic business. The Head of a Department in the Government of India was not permitted to go off on his own: every detail of the tour, including train departures and arrivals and all engagements, had to be stencilled and circulated to all departments well before he left. This did not add much gaiety to travel, and had the unfortunate effect (unfortunate to me, anyway) of encouraging raids by newspaper correspondents at hotels and stations. It was perhaps necessary, since much touring was necessary in a country as large as Europe, that the Government of India should know where its officials were. I had written to Reith (who then and thereafter gave me every assistance in his power, and constantly cheered me with wise letters) asking for the loan of an engineer, since I did not feel competent to make a five-year transmitter plan for India. He sent me Kirke, the Head of the BBC Research Department. Kirke was a great charmer, as well as a highly efficient technician. With him I escaped, when I could, from Delhi, and began to know the extraordinary variety of the Indian continent. Slowly a 'coverage' plan began to emerge.

The Selection Board now met, and interviewed the 300 candidates. The standard was depressingly low. (That, of course, stemmed from Lord Macaulay, who decided that young Indians should be trained as clerks, and nothing else.) Zulfaqar made an immediate impression. When his turn came, Professor Bokhari whispered to me 'This is my brother: had I better go out?' I said he had. The Selection Board gave Zulfaqar first place, and he became, to Gog's rage, the first Director of the Delhi station. I asked one of the candidates: 'Do you know what is meant by the reproduction of programmes?' He replied: 'I think, sir, the Indian masses are too weak to indulge in much reproduction.' I wondered what I was going to do with these people.

It was now high time to train the staff for the Delhi station, and to arrange the programmes for it. It was the first high-powered station in India, and much might depend on its success.

Army Headquarters refused to let Zulfaqar go, and were furious with me for taking him. I had a battle royal before I got him. When he arrived, I thought that I had made a frightful error. He was used to army ways, and I found him one morning drilling the whole staff on the verandah, and teaching them to form fours. Gently I tried to explain that that was not exactly what I required. He said, 'But these people must be disciplined.' However, he was quick to adapt himself, and threw himself into the work with enormous zeal. Without him I don't think that the Delhi station would have started at all: the hurdles were unexpected and tremendous.

None of the staff, of course, had ever seen a microphone before, and they found great difficulty in using it, or in believing that it was of any use. Since Indians in general (and who shall say that they are wrong?) do not find that Time and the Hour run through the smoothest day, the punctuality of programmes left much to be desired. Noise and chatter in the studios seemed incurable. In spite of all that I could do, acoustics were appalling. But the worst hurdle was the performers. Music and mummers were matters held in low repute, rather as Quakers might have regarded them a century before. When I got to India they were almost entirely (the ballet was an exception) in the hands of prostitutes and pimps. No man or woman of the upper or middle classes of India would stoop to the practice of music or acting. This posed a serious problem. There was I, supposed to produce an entertainment service for India, and there were my most likely clients, holding up their hands in horror at the very idea. Moreover, the notion – rapidly spread and embroidered – that I was going to pay colossal sums to all performers, naturally made matters much worse. I was encouraging prostitution, that was what it came to: and it followed, of course, that the favours of all prostitutes were mine at will. It was Zulfaqar who, with great tact and ability, induced a campaign to show that 'prostitutes' was a misleading word. And this was true. It was an Indian custom (and a very wise one) to send young men of seventeen or eighteen to learn about manners, art, and love from women who might be called courtesans. Many of these women had exceptional dignity, intelligence, and grace: they were in fact among the most intellectual Indians of their time. By applying very strict rules in the studios, sacking any performer who behaved badly, and picking only the best singers and instrumentalists, we gradually surmounted the initial fury. But it remained a problem. I was

bombarded with letters from 'respectable' people, saying that their daughters could 'sing a little': you may imagine what their singing was like. Apart from that, most of my artists ate opium, and refused to come to rehearsal in their 'opium-time'.

I must make a slight digression about this. The Western world thinks that opium is a terrible thing, and God knows how many committees and conferences have been held to abolish it. But India gave me a very different impression. The smoking of opium, and the taking of an opium pill, are two vastly different things. Opium smoking, which I tried to see what results it had, is completely horrible: it can induce a certain euphoria, but its effect on health is disastrous: that I know from personal experience. But the opium-pill is quite another thing. It is, like garlic, a disinfectant: it is the quickest and surest remedy for stomach troubles. I do not believe that it has any deleterious effect. I had among my artists an old man of seventy – and I think he is still alive – who was known as the best *sarenghi* player of India. The *sarenghi* is a kind of violin, but very much more complicated. It needs great agility of fingering. This old man was without doubt a beautiful executant, and he told me that he had taken an opium pill every morning from the age of seven and had never been ill. I was impressed by his story (and the similar stories of other artists) and convened a meeting of Indian doctors, to get a ruling from them. They were outspoken on three points (a) that opium pills did no harm, and probably protected against disease (b) that the West had not begun to understand the healing qualities of opium, and (c) that cancer could be arrested, or at least kept at bay, for thirty years or so by the use of opium pills. I had not, of course, the means or time or knowledge to make any scientific check: but I did find myself eventually in the odd position of obtaining and distributing opium as the Head of a Government Department. Later, when I had an especially painful operation in London, and the English doctors refused me drugs, I wondered whether Indian opinion might not be right.

I now began to skirmish with Authority. The studio premises were appalling, the rates of pay were enough to degrade any organisation, and the whole business of building up a broadcasting network was generally regarded as wasteful and unnecessary. I had to fight for every penny. One announcer per station was thought quite enough. In Government budgets I was 'credited' with the very small amount flowing from license fees (not only were there few listeners, but most of those did not

pay), but not with the much more considerable sums arising from the 50 per cent duty on each imported set – and no sets were manufactured in India. Thus, at the time of every budget, I was a target for questions such as: ‘Why are Indian finances burdened with this losing concern?’ If the Minister replied that the Government thought that India should have a broadcasting service, the supplementary question came pat: ‘Why isn’t it run by an Indian?’

My progress was largely controlled by the Cabinet Minister (or Member of the Viceroy’s Council) who was answerable for broadcasting in the Assembly. I had three of these in succession, and I should not have chosen them myself. The first, Sir Frank Noyce, was a harmless man who had risen from the ranks, made a successful career in India over forty years, and was about to retire. What he most wanted was to have no Botherers. I was a Bother. He did not care – why should he? – if Indian broadcasting succeeded or failed: it was a new gadget, and as such rather suspect. My careful and sometimes angry arguments were shot at his immense paunch and glittering pince-nez, and bounced back. I might as well have talked to a feather-bed. The second, Sir Thomas Stewart, stymied me whenever he could. On one occasion, when I was pressing some matter which he opposed, and which I thought of critical importance, he said blandly: ‘My dear Fielden, you waste words. You do not seem to realize that I can do, and I shall do, exactly as I choose.’ I was so angry that I still see him saying it, with a photo of the Parthenon behind his head. ‘A damned little twopenny dictator,’ I thought. However, his brother, Sir Findlater Stewart, was Permanent Under-Secretary at the India Office. I could often have murdered Stewart, but somehow I could never quite dislike him. He had charm. But the third, Sir Andrew Clow, was far and away the worst of the three as far as I was concerned. He was a pious Presbyterian, and he suspected that broadcasting was wicked, and that I was its Mephistopheles. He would summon me to Simla at a week-end, and there, in the antimacassarial glories of Inverarm would play hymn tunes by the hour on an upright piano, and very badly. He loved anything which reflected badly on me, and would carefully read every translation of gossip-columns in the many little scandal sheets of India, and then confront me with them with a long face. Once when I was accused of homosexuality, his pious sermon so annoyed me that I said, ‘And if it were true, Sir Andrew, what business is it of yours, if I do my job properly?’

I thought he would explode. It was the kind of remark which annihilated him. He thought it incomprehensible and Samsonic. He liked to live in blinkers. One day he said to me 'Last Sunday I listened, reverently, to a Divine Service on the BBC. And at the end they said *that it had been recorded!*' Now is not that a blasphemous 'scandal?' He caused me much trouble, did Sir Andrew, and I never got on with him at all. These three gentlemen were, I suppose, fitted for the posts which they occupied, but nobody on earth could say that they were good for Indian broadcasting.

I worked extremely hard, and I don't think anyone could have spent more time on the job than I did. Whether I spent intelligence is another question. Arnold Bennett once said that nobody ever died of overwork: they died only from disorganised work. A short while ago I came across, in an old book, a detailed table of my engagements. My office hours were from 7 till 1, and from 5 to 7 – this was an arrangement prompted by Indian heat. In the intervals I went to the Station to examine programmes and supervise rehearsals: I slogged through lessons in Urdu: I attended to Indian visitors, mostly white-bearded, who would usually come at 6 a.m. or at 4 p.m., and I tried to think out future plans for stations, staff, programmes, and salaries. I got malaria, as everyone in India did. Malaria in India is rather like the common cold in England, except that it is less annoying, but runs a higher temperature. If your temperature was less than 102° , you went to work as usual, and did not feel anything much except a headache. But when I got malignant tertian, it was a different matter. I was very much surprised when I put a thermometer in my mouth and saw it register 105.5° . I was surprised because I did not feel particularly ill, although I was shaking like a pneumatic drill. I don't know quite what malaria does to one's body (and I doubt if anyone else does) but it seems to me that, when you once have it, you have it for keeps. When I left India in 1940, I did a long cure of quinine, and it appeared that I was cured. But when I went back to India in 1950, I had not been a week in Karachi (and it was winter, when malaria scarcely appears at all) before I went down with a ferocious attack of it. I conclude that it is a permanent guest. In any case, whether through malaria or overwork, I developed – though, I did not then know it – tuberculosis. And no doubt that affected my temper.

When I had been in India for about six months, two curious (and subdued) events occurred. The first was that the Prime

Minister, Mr Baldwin, wrote me a letter which was opened by the CID. The letter was marked 'Prime Minister', and was both written and addressed in his own hand. In it he agreed with some of my conclusions, and said that the Viceroy (oh Heavens!) would be directed to give me better assistance. I had known for some time that many of my letters were opened, because one of my clerks had been in the CID office and knew all the tricks. And they were surprising. I learnt – fairly easily – how you can break and replace any seal with a thin hot knife: and I learnt also, which surprised me more, how a letter can, with a special pin, be rolled up and drawn out of the bottom corner of an envelope, and then replaced. Nobody looks at the bottom corner of an envelope. I learnt many other such tricks. I knew when letters were opened. I was infuriated by the case of Mr Baldwin's letter. Not only would it infallibly stop Baldwin from writing to me again: it would also earn me more hatred from the Viceroy and the Ministers. I took a hundred opened envelopes and went with them to Sir John X, Head of the CID. I asked him why he opened my letters. He laughed. 'You neurotic people,' he said, 'get such queer ideas. We don't open your letters: you imagine it.' I threw my bunch on to the table, and exclaimed: 'Let me tell you how these letters were opened.' He made a face and said: 'Well, well, that's just bad luck: a certain number of letters are opened as a routine: yours have just happened to be unlucky.' I said: 'Sir John, what have you got against me? Do you think I am working for Gandhi?' He shook his head. 'No, no.' 'Do you think I am a Communist?' 'Oh dear no.' 'Then,' I asked, 'what have you got against me? You have stolen my keys and searched my house, among other things. May I not ask you why?' He replied: 'You are talking a lot of nonsense: but if you want it straight from the shoulder, India is no place for Left Intellectuals.' Two years later I went to his funeral, and felt no grief.

The other event was curiouiser – straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. To make it clear, I must explain (bear with me) some details of the Government of India as I knew it. India, as I have said, is a sub-continent into which you could put the whole of Europe. The Pathan and the Bengali are as different, and as remote, from the Madrasi as the Swedes or Finns from the Spaniards. This conglomeration of races was ruled by some 1,500 English Civil Servants and a small army of about 60,000 men. The whole budget (because the country was so poor) amounted to about one-twelfth of an English one. Therefore the problems of

India were largely insoluble. You might have excellent men, but distance, disparity of views and customs, and shortage of money could confound the best policies. And Indians did not like us. These facts tended to a sort of hopelessness, a feeling that so much and no more could be done, but that Authority must be preserved at all costs. And from this it followed naturally that the Government must live apart, in a sort of Holy Heaven of its own, like the Gods in Tennyson's *Lotus Eaters*. This grew into a passion for secrecy. The Viceroy and his Council, and their staff, became Untouchables. The files in which the Viceroy and his Ministers wrote were never allowed to percolate down to the Departments, which had other staffs and other files. But the people who allowed this to happen were such nitwits that they failed to realize that the Cabinet Staff of Indians would inevitably contain some rebels, as well as a great many clerks who were related to clerks in the Departmental staffs. Thus the 'Very Secret' notes of the Viceroy quickly reached the Departments. A kind of absurd spy system was set up. But there was more to it than this. Faced by the enormous difficulties of their tasks, the officials of the Government of India had begun – as bureaucratic officials often do – to resent any suggestion of haste. They had to have time to pass the baby around, and sometimes to let it quietly die. As in India small notice was taken of any criticism of the eternally-fixed Government, this attitude was free to develop: and it developed into an astounding inertia. Gradually it became *praiseworthy* for an official to have as many files (pending) as possible in his office. It was almost a point of honour. To my astonishment I saw many high officials surrounded by piles of files which covered the entire floor space of their office. Some were six months old. And so far had this process gone that the Government of India had actually issued a general order which prohibited any Head of Department from reminding the Government about a pending file until six weeks after it had been sent in. Now it happened that broadcasting was not amenable to this process. I could not defer for six weeks or longer a decision to replace an announcer who was ill, or to decide whether some ceremony should be broadcast or not, or to send an order for valves to Marconi's. I therefore went in person to badger officials, and they did not like it. I don't suppose that I was either tactful or polite. At the same time I was growing tired of English parties, I refused to join the European club, I made a number of

Indian friends, I would not have a Government-allotted house, and I went quite often to see Gandhi.

These things and others made me extremely unpopular with the Government. They began to think (and who knows if they were right?) that under my guidance broadcasting might develop not only into a great nuisance, but also into a great danger. I might act rashly – which was not done in India. But they were in a pickle about getting rid of me. They could not say that I did not work: they had no actual crimes to put against me, and in any case they had ‘chosen’ me and signed my contract. So somebody suggested that a Commission should be set up to declare that I was of unsound mind. This news was conveyed to me by my own staff, who advised me to be careful. I laughed at them: I did not believe a word of it. So they brought me the Council files: and there, incontrovertibly, it was. It had been turned down as impracticable, but the suggestion had been made. I was dumbfounded. For a while I asked myself whether perhaps I *was* of unsound mind. My anger against the Government of India increased.

So far, I have painted this picture of India, in 1936, in sombre colours. But nobody, as far as I know, has ever set down these rather trivial facts: and any historian worth his salt must take them into consideration when he considers the downfall of the British Raj. And downfall it was: don’t let anyone make the mistake of thinking that Attlee or Mountbatten or England made a great and noble gesture of renunciation. We got out of India because we ruled it so ineffectively that we were forced out – and also, of course, because we had neither the troops nor the money, after the 1939 war, to hold it by force. No credit is due to England for the events of 1946 and 1947. It was not, as Lawrence had hoped, a noble gesture: it was a feeble one.

But few lives are altogether sombre, and mine in India certainly wasn’t. To travel round India as I did, with a purpose and a welcome everywhere, was an adventure and a delight. From dusty Sind to the rugged North West Frontier: from the dramatic snows of Darjeeling to rainy Chittagong, up the wide sluggish river to Dacca, and to the sprawling human ant-heap of Calcutta, where in the palatial English swimming-pools five hundred fat naked Englishmen were sedulously dried by black slaves. And so to the temple of Puri and through the jungles of the Central Provinces and down to Madras, a city which seems to turn away disdainfully from the great rollers which break along its humid

shores. And Mysore so different, with its Sussex-like downs: and the dreamy lagoons of Travancore. At Hyderabad I had an unforgettable dinner with the Prime Minister, the wise and gentle Akhbar Hydari, sitting alone with him in an immense garden, with thirty-four huge fountains playing for our benefit. He sent me in luxury to see the cave paintings of Ajanta, which no one who sees them will forget. And so to other palaces such as those of Baroda, Jaipur, and enchanting Udaipur: and to others still, where Maharajahs were crazy enough to reassure me about my own sanity. It was a splendid experience: and I gradually came to learn something about Indian life and customs, and of the very varied races which inhabited the sub-continent. I grew perplexed about the application of broadcasting to this Tower of Babel, but also grew to love the sprawling muddle of India better. Established Western habits began to seem less valid. Were not Indians perhaps right when they said that you should wash always under running water, and that to sit and soak in a dirty bath was disgusting? Was there something to be said for their horror of used cutlery, when you saw Indian fingers manipulating food with such delicate dexterity, and such careful washing before and after it? Was not there something charming in the attitude that silence is never embarrassing, and 'small talk' foolish? And surely the *dhoti* (when you saw it at its best, as in Bihar) is a mode of dress far more becoming, simple, inexpensive, and clean than the extraordinary Western array, where a man needs at least ten different garments before he is clothed, and usually keeps most of them far from clean? Not that I could exactly see English squires hunting and shooting in a *dhoti*: still, I pondered over these and many other such matters, and wondered whether the BBC conception of broadcasting might not be entirely wrong for India.

By the time that I had spent eighteen months in India, things were beginning to move fairly favourably. New stations were coming along, the nucleus of an excellent staff had been assembled and trained (partly with the help of the BBC school), programmes were improving, and the general attitude to broadcasting had become much more respectful. Even Mr Rajagopalachari, the Prime Minister of Madras, who had argued with me furiously against any broadcasting in India (and, in my opinion, he was and he is the wisest man in India) had come round to it. I had managed to change the name of the organisation, and this trivial event pleased me. I had never liked the title ISBS (Indian

State Broadcasting Service) which to me seemed not only unwieldy but also tainted with officialdom. After a good deal of cogitation – which may seem ridiculous now, but these apparently simple and obvious things do not always appear easily – I had concluded that All-India Radio would give me not only protection from the clauses which I most feared in the 1935 Act, but would also have the suitable initials AIR. I worked out a monogram which placed these letters over the map of India, and it is now about the only thing which remains of me in India. But, when I mooted this point, I found that there was immense opposition in the Secretariat to any such change. They wanted ISBS and they thought it fine. I realized that I must employ a little unnatural tact. I cornered Lord Linlithgow after a Viceregal banquet, and said plaintively that I was in a great difficulty and needed his advice. (He usually responded well to such an opening). I said I was sure that he agreed with me that ISBS was a clumsy title. After a slight pause, he nodded his long head wisely. Yes, it was rather a mouthful. I said that perhaps it was a pity to use the word broadcasting at all, since all Indians had to say ‘brodcasting’ – *broad* was for them an unpronounceable word. But I could *not*, I said, think of another title: could he help me? ‘Indian State,’ I said, was a term which, as he well knew, hardly fitted into the 1935 Act. It should be something general. He rose beautifully to the bait. ‘All India?’ I expressed my astonishment and admiration. The very thing. But surely not ‘broadcasting’? After some thought he suggested, ‘radio?’ Splendid, I said – and what beautiful initials! The Viceroy concluded that he had invented it, and there was no more trouble. His pet name must be adopted. Thus All India Radio was born.

By 1937 I had become – as Indian officials were apt to do – an intolerant little dictator. Although I got some doubtless salutary checks from above, I was a king of my growing dunghill. I took greater pleasure in flattery and less in contradiction. Doubtless the appointments which I made (or persuaded a Selection Board to make) suffered accordingly. I began to like yes-men. All India Radio was not exactly robust, but it was a growing and healthy child. I had a nucleus of Station Directors who knew their jobs admirably. There were one or two flies in my ointment. Before Kirke had returned to England, he had interviewed all applicants for the post of Chief Engineer, and had concluded that none of them could quite stand up to the business of creating a whole new network. (Or perhaps, to put it in another way, Indian

engineers in highly-paid commercial jobs were not attracted by the salary I could offer.) I was very much against the appointment of an Englishman, and invitations were issued to Indians in England. But they came to nothing. Eventually it was agreed between the various interested parties that an Engineer should be sent out from the BBC. This was Cecil Goyder. Goyder was a conscientious, hardworking, proficient man who did a great job for India, and it was largely owing to him that All India Radio, in its early days, had few technical failures. Goyder fitted beautifully into Anglo-Indian society, but he did not fit me. From the moment I saw him descend from the aeroplane, wearing a high stiff collar and an outsize topee, I knew that my relations with him could never be cordial. I don't think that we ever quarrelled: on the other hand, I doubt if I ever held any conversation with him which was not official. He did not like me and my ways, and I could not warm to him. This was a pity, though only a small one: it widened the gap which always exists between engineers and executives, whether on a ship or in a factory, and thus tended to feuds within the AIR. Still, one can't have everything, and Goyder was a first-class technician. The other flies were a bit more serious. Impressed by Zulfaqar Bokhari, I had jumped to the conclusion that his brother, the Professor, would be no less valuable. When it became obvious that a Deputy-Director was necessary (particularly when I was away on tour) I asked for the Professor. Zulfaqar warned me, with perfect good sense, that I was making a great mistake: his brother, he said, was a scholar who would hate the rough-and-tumble of broadcasting, and I should run into great trouble by employing two brothers. But, I had become dictatorial and I would not listen.

When Ahmed Shah Bokhari arrived, he had made up his mind about me, not quite correctly. He thought that I was a rather silly Englishman, and that he would succeed me, and he was correct on both points: he also thought that I should become a figurehead which he would control, and in this he was wrong. He started out by coming every evening to my house, and reading aloud to me from the English poets. Since I had selected and listened to the best English voices for eight years, the fearful Indian pronunciation and intonation affected me like a piano out-of-tune. To escape, I ran away to the Station and talked over, or listened to, programmes. There Ahmed Shah would pursue me, and, coming into office or studio, would say to his brother 'Get out!', and would then sit in the chair opposite me

and put his feet on the table. Since I had chosen him and he was my Deputy, I could not object. But a cold war developed, and I was no match for this Krushchev. He was one of the wittiest men I have ever known, a brilliant conversationalist with a wide culture. Gradually I became aware not only that he was damning me with faint praise to all my Indian friends ('Poor Fielden, he means well, but of course he knows so little about India, and he thinks you're a damned fool') but also that he was carrying tales about me to the Government of India ('Fielden has just been to see Gandhi: Fielden has had a secret meeting with Nehru: Fielden loathes the Viceroy'). When I taxed him with these things, his tears would drip on to my blotting-pad, and for a while they convinced me: but soon there was incontrovertible evidence of his attitude. And there arose a Whispering Scandal, which I don't doubt originated from him. It was said that the AIR should be rechristened the BBC – the Bokhari Brothers Corporation. This, though only a whisper, was damaging: it seemed best to send Zulfaqar to the new Station at Bombay, where he was successful and, as far as I know, happy: but I never got as good a Station Director for Delhi, and my interest in the programmes there waned, which was doubtless what Ahmed Shah desired. I am far from attributing any blame to A. S. Bokhari: he was a brilliant man who did what to him seemed right. I was up against (as in the BBC) a man whose thoughts ran naturally to the power of broadcasting, rather than to the quality of its programmes. Such men probably hold all the best cards. •

The Indian Congress leaders have so far had no place in this narrative, and it is time that they did. Some three months after my arrival in India, Gandhi had come to Delhi and established himself, as was his wont, in a camp outside the city. I asked the Home Minister if I might go to see him. The Home Minister said no. I asked why. The Home Minister said that I was 'too close to the Government'. I said that I did not see how I could run broadcasting if I did not know the point of view of Indian Nationalists. He was obdurate. I went to see Mr Gandhi next day. (At that time, I should have been quite glad if the Government had sacked me.) Mrs Naidu met me at the entrance to the camp, and said, laughing: 'So you've dared to come to see our Micky Mouse!' But, Gandhi, standing in the verandah of his hut, only smiled and scribbled a note which was handed down to me. It said: 'My dear Child, This is my Silence Day: so you can talk, but I can't.' I could only say 'No, no, Mr Gandhi, that won't

do: I shall come back tomorrow.' So I came back tomorrow. It was evening, and he was lying on the floor of his hut, with a hurricane lamp beside him. I put the case for Indian broadcasting as best I could. He kicked his legs in the air, throwing wild shadows over the gleaming rush matting, and said: 'I see what you are - a milk-and-water Liberal. You have no place in India. This is an armed camp. Be on one side or the other.' I said that I could no more be on one side than a telephone could be on one side: I was only a transmitter. He replied, 'Don't blame *me* then, if both sides throw stones at you.' In spite of such exchanges I soon had a great affection for Gandhi: and I think that I can say without immodesty that he liked me. When, later, I pressed him to broadcast, he said: 'My dear Fielden, you know and I know that if I do so I shall increase the number of your listeners by four or five millions overnight: if I knew that you were going to stay in India, I might do it: if you don't, I shall merely increase the strength of my enemies.' There was no denying this. Gandhi was, I think, a much lesser man than India has chosen to imagine him: he was, aesthetically, blind and deaf: he had not the smallest understanding or knowledge of music, painting, sculpture, architecture, or even Nature: and his literary knowledge was absurdly limited. His favourite author was Thoreau, and one can well understand why. Such a man could not really see all sides of life clearly. On the other hand he had an endearing Puckish humour, an enormous love and compassion for the human race, and a very shrewd brain. He had a remarkable intuition about people, and pierced through all hypocrisy to the heart. It was always fun to be with him. Legend credits him with a skeletal body and an ascetic life: in fact, he was quite plump, and his huts and food, though simple, were as attractive as any average man could wish: I, a sybarite by nature, could have been quite happy with them. I was immensely impressed by his theory of passive resistance, which has been much misunderstood: in the light of later events I saw clearly how true it was that, given no collaborators and an absolute refusal to help an enemy, the enemy could in the long run be defeated without weapons. Once, when I was arguing with him about this, he said: 'My dear boy, I don't cheat myself with any belief that India would be with me: perhaps only a thousandth part would be with me; perhaps my gospel will not be understood for a thousand generations, perhaps never: but that does not alter the fact that it is right.'

Jawaharlal Nehru was a very different character: a man of

great culture and violent temperament, he had, and has, his feet in both Indian and European tradition. He is a man of immense and compelling charm who can quite often act like a spoiled baby. On one occasion he rang me up at ten o'clock at night from Gandhi's camp, and said: 'Look, there's no food here; could you give some to Nan (his sister) and me, if we came over?' This was so astonishing and unusual that I was almost struck dumb. I stammered that all the servants had gone to bed (in India they live outside the house), but that I could scramble some eggs. 'Fine,' said J.N. 'But no politics, mind.' They came over and we spent a delightful evening, during which Nehru remarked that my drawing-room was 'stately, but hardly cosy' – a remark which I threw back at him when I visited him in 1950 in the luxurious palace of the Commander-in-Chief. It wasn't possible not to like such a man, or indeed his very charming sister, Mrs Pandit. When, in 1936, I was struggling with misery and frustration, I wrote to both Gandhi and Nehru, asking why they would not lift a hand to help me. Both replied in personally-written letters, and here they are:

Segaon, Wardha

Dear Fielden,

I value the confidence you have given me. My sympathies are with you in your troubles. But you have to take them philosophically, if you must stick to your post: even though it be for the good of the country. Any attack on your personal character is a vile thing. But any society has its share of blackmailers. These you should laugh at. Then there are the critics. You may not expect informed criticism. Very few write for the public good: most write for money. Then there is the third class who don't come to you as you would have them to do. They don't in spite of themselves. Those who know you would like to avail themselves of the facilities you may give them but they know that the harm done by such co-operation will be greater than the good intended. Take Raj Kumari herself. Even she can go only a certain distance and no further. You must not grieve over this but take it as inevitable in the circumstances surrounding us.

Yours sincerely,
M. K. GANDHI

Anand Bhawan, Allahabad

Jan. 3, 1937

My dear Fielden,

Your letter reached me and it made painful reading. I am afraid you are a misfit in that job or in India: but then all of us are. What is one to do about it? You blame others (including innocent me!) but does not the fault lie really in the environment, in circumstances which are bigger than individuals, in the unhealthy relation between India and England, in the topsy-turvy world itself? Broadcasting is a great thing, I believe in it. But it is after all a part of a much larger whole, and if the body is sick how can you treat a finger or a limb?

I cannot write to you all I want to. I am writing this note in haste. I am off on one of my interminable tours and for seven weeks I shall have no rest. But even if I had more time I doubt if a letter would convey to you all I feel. I wish you could come here and spend a few days with us. Both my sister and I would be happy to have you and perhaps you might feel better and calmer for a change.

I have had to put up with a great deal which might have embittered me and filled me with hate and yet I have survived. I feel pretty lonely often enough but not bitter against anybody. Why should you succumb to this bitterness and hate? I suppose Delhi, Imperial Delhi, is partly responsible for it. It is not easy to remain sane there and even I cannot stand it for long.

India is a very friendly place. It has so many hateful aspects but so many more lovable ones. You must get behind the mask and get in tune with it. Unhappily you have started at the wrong place, with the wrong people. Not your fault of course.

I wish I could help you. Perhaps I can in some odd ways. Write to me sometimes about books and pictures and anything else that you like. Your letters will be welcome. In spite of politics, I have not lost my humanity.

Yours,

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

In July 1937, when I was due for a two-yearly six weeks leave in England, I went to say goodbye to the Griggs, whom I should not see in India again, since their time there was finished. I said to Lady Grigg: 'I hope that my aeroplane crashes: I have done all I can, and I see no future for me.' She said, naturally: 'What

utter nonsense you talk!' But it was not quite nonsense. I had come to a dead end, though my words may have been prompted partly by a tired body. I was not in the habit of weighing myself, and I did not know, or even suppose, that my weight had declined from ten stone to eight. As I am six foot two, this was a bad business. But I was far too busy to realize that I was ill. I was even too busy (and here I am afraid that Arnold Bennett's dictum about disorganisation applies) to make proper arrangements for my journey from Delhi to the airport of Jodhpur. As a result, I found myself in a small train crossing the Great Indian Desert in the height of summer, and without either airconditioning or the block of ice which I had failed to order or, come to that, a topee. I am sure that eggs would have fried in three seconds on the roof of that carriage, and I fried inside it. I arrived at Jodhpur in a state of near-collapse. As it happened, two cousins of mine, Derek and Peggy Walker, were travelling by the same flight. Peggy told me later that they were so appalled at the sight of me that they actually made arrangements as to what they would do if I died on the journey. Peggy was to continue to London, while Derek supervised the funeral arrangements. Indeed when we came down for the night at Baghdad, I thought that my number was up. I lay on my bed and sweated, and felt that I was falling through endless blackness into everlasting night. At Croydon my friends were even more appalled than the Walkers had been. My eyes had sunk into my head, and my cheek-bones stood out white. My doctor, Isaac Jones, most endearing of men, who always on principle denied the existence of any disease, said heartily that I was a bit run down, and should drink four quarts (or something like it) of milk every day. I did this, and soon recovered. My 18 went unrecognized. I had a whale of a time in London. I had spent very little money in India and my bank balance was higher than I had ever known it. I took a luxurious flat, entertained largely, and bought a Jaguar car. I also wrote two turnover articles for *The Times* on Indian broadcasting; and Philip Graves (I think) followed them with a leader. I put a strong case against the meanness and inertia of the Government of India. The articles caused a fluttering of many dovescotes, and the Government of India were silly enough to issue a formal communiqué, stating that 'they were not in agreement with the views of the writer'. They must have been fairly certain that the writer was myself, but *The Times* was silent as the grave about that, and Robin Barrington-Ward never gave me

away. The *démenti* merely had the effect of focussing attention on the articles, and popularising them in India. Was I wrong to write them? Well, that is a debatable point. How far should the 'loyalty' of a civil servant extend?

I now felt very unwilling to return to India. Indeed the thought of it gave me a sinking sensation. This was a temporary aberration, and did not mean that I disliked India *per se*. It was a compound, I imagine, of ill-health, a distaste for further inevitable quarrels with Bokhari senior and the Government of India, an unenticing contrast between dreary Delhi and my gay London holiday, and, most of all, of a feeling that I had played my part, and it was over. I had given a rude shove and kick to All India Radio, which was maybe in the right direction, and maybe in the wrong one. But I was not temperamentally fitted for the steady push which was now required. I understood for the first time why Reith had got bored with the BBC. Pioneering is always fun, and seems worth while: organisations once formed are inevitably dreary, and the motive of action is lost. I endeavoured to put a buffer between my holiday and my return by arranging a motoring trip through Germany with my friends Patrick Baggallay and Harry Dakeyne. And it was a charming trip. Strangely enough, Germany in 1937 seemed to us extremely pleasant. After the war, a great deal was said to the effect that the people of Germany ought to have known what was going on, and stopped it. All I can say is that we, as tourists, found only what seemed a very friendly, prosperous, and happy country. There was no sign of fear or cruelty. When I waved good-bye to my friends at the Munich airport, my heart was sinking: by the time I reached Athens, and nodded to Indian officials in the dreary dining-room of the Grande Bretagne, it was in the soles of my shoes. In melancholy mood, I drove myself from Jodhpur to Delhi, breaking down and getting stuck at Alwar *en route*, but avoiding a repetition of the horrible train.

I shall not linger over my two subsequent years in India: and you may be glad of that. I have painted the picture as I saw it, and it did not greatly alter. All India Radio grew, and grew inevitably out of my control. I felt as if I were being slowly hoisted into a curtained howdah on the back of a swelling elephant. Pioneering days were over. I had done my utmost, with careful rules of promotion, to avoid the rise of clerks who knew nothing about programmes, and to keep rewards and prizes for those who possessed originality and vigour, however intractable

their personalities might be. But I could not stop the growth of red tape or the accumulation of a deadly routine. Gradually I myself was swamped by problems such as the development of foreign broadcasts, the imminence of war and the attendant preparations, the maddening contracts with gramophone companies, the mass of Parliamentary questions, the welfare, housing, and pay of an increasing staff, the international quarrels about wave-lengths, the printing and circulation of radio publications, the tenders for new stations, the purchase of land for studios and transmitters, the question of acoustics, and the relations of All India Radio with Provincial Governments. These and many more such kept me chained to my desk. Earlier I had known every member of my staff, and his or her family history: now I hardly saw them after a brief encounter at a Selection Board, and even Selection Boards had to be held in my absence at outlying stations. I was being, so to speak, squeezed upwards and outwards, and I did not like it. More and more I tended towards isolation: and Advani, now Station Director at Delhi, dubbed me – not without justice – ‘The Prisoner’.

Occasionally I played some little games with the Government. Sir Thomas Stewart, who had now become Governor of Bihar, rashly promised his Prime Minister that ‘he would make Fielden give them a radio station’. The Government of India requested me to go to Patna and discuss it. I replied that such a journey would be useless: Patna did not, and could not, rate as a necessary centre under our five-year plan. The Government nevertheless replied that I must go to Patna ‘if only to explain the Governor’s promise’. I said that I would do no such thing. The Government then sent me a ‘secret’ letter (two envelopes and two seals, and common property of all the clerks) saying that I was ‘ordered’ to go to Patna. I went to bed, and said I had malaria. My clerks brought me the Council files, which said: ‘The Controller of Broadcasting is being obstinately disobedient.’ Another secret letter arrived, stating that I should proceed to Patna as soon as my health permitted. I proceeded. It was a twenty-four hour journey. At Patna I was met by the Prime Minister, his Cabinet, and a lot of his friends. We adjourned to his house for a merry dinner. I was asked to make a speech. I stated the facts, i.e., that Patna would be ‘covered’ by the new Calcutta station, that I had no money for another, and that I would gladly build one if the Prime Minister would give me the cash. My train left at midnight and I repeated the twenty-four-

hour journey. Next morning the Indian papers were full of my speech – with an acid comment from the Patna Government that the Governor had promised something he could not fulfil. The Government of India sent me a secret and angry letter saying that I was forbidden to ‘give any more interviews to journalists’. I replied that I hadn’t done so in the Patna case, since I had not opened my mouth except in the Prime Minister’s house: but that I was delighted to be freed from journalistic interviews and would in future tell all journalists that the Government did not allow me to speak to them. A furious secret letter came back, saying that I was ‘deliberately misinterpreting’ what had been said, and that I was of course free to give interviews, but that ‘*I must not speak on matters of policy*’. To that I replied rudely that whatever I said must inevitably be a matter of policy. A week later I went down to Madras. The Editor of the *Madras Mail*, an amusing fellow (and English), wanted to know what I was going to do in South India. I said smugly that the Government of India did not permit me to speak on matters of policy. Next day this was all over India. The Government sent me a Letter of Censure. A Letter of Censure was, for the Civil Service, a dreaded instrument: it blocked all promotion and titles. Since I wasn’t interested in titles or promotion, I sent back the rudest letter I could write, saying that I should be delighted to have ten thousand letters of censure, and they would not alter my point of view about the Government’s stupidity.

A more comic incident occurred when one of my Station Directors decided to have a series of talks on the butterflies of India. It happened that an English civil servant, then retired, had made himself an expert on these, and my Station Director, quite rightly, wrote to him in England asking if he would record a talk. This old gentleman – and it was typical of the ICS – was infuriated by the letter, and sent it to the India Office in London, asking how on earth it came about that *an Indian* was allowed to write to him directly, instead of the British Head of the Department. The India Office took the matter most seriously, and it was passed from office to office in that building, with queries and counter-queries as to what Indian broadcasting was, and who I was, and where the butterflies came in. When it reached the Government of India, it was already a formidable file: and, of course, the series of talks had long finished. The Government of India added to it at great length (‘*Is a Station Director of AIR entitled to write to anyone in England? Your*

comments, please.'). When, eventually, it reached me, I wrote on it: 'The only answer to all this nonsense is the plural of two globular objects.' And I made assurance doubly sure by getting hold of the Viceregal file, and writing the same remark on it. My clerks, of course, never knew what it meant. The Government of India (in a secret letter) said that I was to remove it from the files. I said that I would resign sooner. Nothing more was heard. I hope that it still exists.

I had, when I arrived, decided that I would not, like other Heads of Departments, spend the months of April-October in Simla. It was of course a fairly natural thing to do: most departments could be 'run' from Simla, and their staffs thus escaped summer on the plains. But it was clearly impractical for broadcasting, and especially for broadcasting in its initial stages. I had to be on the spot: indeed I had quite often to take the place of the announcer. I was told that I should be ill if I stayed in the plains in summer: and I was agreeably surprised to find, in 1936, that this was quite untrue. When the thermometer rose to 122° in the shade, I found it an amusing new experience, and managed to get through my work quite well. But as one summer succeeded another, I got on much worse. I don't know if this is a general rule, and whether (as I have been told) the blood gets thinned and one is less able to stand the heat. Or maybe my general health deteriorated. In any case, by the summer of 1939 I was finding Delhi almost impossible to take. The day did not matter so much: it was the night, when the temperature remained above 100°, which was ruinous. It was not possible to sleep in or on a bed: one had to stretch oneself on the ground on a bit of rush matting. The blazing gold and sparkle of the gold mohur trees (whose orchidaceous flowers, when you pick them, stink like rotten meat), and the repeated piercing cry of the brain-fever bird, became symbols of nightmare. In June 1939 ill-health began to interfere with my work, and the Indian doctors thought that I should have an abdominal operation. I therefore asked the Government for medical leave, which was granted. I felt too queasy (which now seems absurd) to face the air journey, and decided to go by sea. I had a faint feeling that war would be declared before I could return, but I did not think very clearly about anything. In any case all the arrangements had been made for that eventuality. And I had no doubt that All India Radio could get along very well without me: I was not indispensable. In short, as Samuel Butler remarked, just as confidence breeds

power, so the want of it breeds impotence. In India I had lost confidence not only in England and the West, but also, and seriously, in myself. Four years of hard labour had produced fourteen transmitters and a competent staff – and in four years the four hundred million people of India had bought exactly eighty five thousand wireless sets. It was enough to make a cat laugh. It was the biggest flop of all time.

Chapter Five

But Lord! to see the absurd nature of Englishmen

SAMUEL PEPPYS

WAKING IN A cloud of chloroform in St Thomas's Hospital, I found by my bedside a long official envelope, and in it a marathon of a letter. It was addressed from 6 Burlington Gardens and dated 1st August 1939: signed A. P. Waterfield. Accustomed by this time to official letters, I looked at the end first. It ran as follows:

'Accordingly, we decided to ask the Government of India if they would lend you to us, if you were willing to come, for this purpose and under these conditions, for a few weeks beginning on September 1st, which we chose since some of us hope to be away on holiday during a part of August.'

Fateful days for holidays.

'The telegram containing this message went off on 16th June, and the Government of India have replied that they have no objection, if you are willing, but that in fact you left India on the same day on medical leave and may require an operation which would incapacitate you for three weeks. I suggest therefore that, if the suggestion appeals to you, and your health permits, you should, when you get this letter, get into touch with Sir Campbell Stuart and Ivison Macadam, both of whom I believe you know. I should hope that, after you have had a talk with them, you will be able to judge whether you would like to help us in this way and under these conditions, for a few weeks, preferably from September 1st onwards, if your health then permits: and I shall be glad if you will let me know your decision as soon as possible, so that I may let the Government of India know, through the India Office.'

Evidently the letter offered some excuse for me to remain for a time in England, and, at this moment of crisis, the thought was

welcome. But what precisely was I expected to do? I turned back to the earlier part of the letter.

'In the light of these facts, we reached two conclusions. First, that we should in all probability need to employ a man with broadcasting experience in the Ministry, but 'until we had made further progress with our planning it would be difficult to say exactly what qualifications we should need to look for in the holder of this appointment. And secondly, that the best plan would be to invite someone with such experience to come and help us for a short time on our planning work, without either side being committed to offer or accept a whole-time appointment in the Ministry in the Event of War.'

August 1939. In the Event of War. Under these conditions. Further progress with our planning. No commitments. Exactly what qualifications? A short time. Difficult to say exactly. My thoughts went back to Italy, Germany, Russia. Would they be writing such letters? But I was still in a haze: a chloroform haze, perhaps. I turned back to the letter again.

'On the one hand, we shall have close and constant contact with the BBC, who will remain constitutionally independent, but will naturally act under Government instructions . . .'

H'm.

'... so far as may be necessary, in matters that concern the national interest and the conduct of the war . . .'

No doubt about war, then? I could not believe it.

'... our position in relation to them will more or less resemble that of the Foreign Office and Colonial Office today. That is, we shall be concerned with the general principles of publicity in war-time . . .'

Principles?

'... including the supply of news and publicity material and the censorship: they will be concerned with the problem of how best to convey such material to the listener by means of broadcasting technique, in which we should not seek to interfere.'

But I should. My experience was not with supply, but with the presentation of supply. The letter did not enthuse me. On the other hand, I knew that Waterfield was an amiable and conscientious man: under this official verbiage might lurk an opportunity worth pursuing. Not that I was consciously pursuing anything very much: like many others, I was trapped by the thunderous future.

Scent proved very poor in my hunt, for Campbell Stuart and

Iverson Macadam. Covert after covert was drawn in vain. Either they were away, or unavailable, or engaged in some hush-hush conference. Finally cornered, they gave me a cool, not to say frigid, reception. Vague hints of their own burdens and anxieties were conveyed to me: but they were not disposed to speak of Waterfield or of me. What was I to Waterfield, or Waterfield to them? I never did discover. I could only pursue Waterfield.

Waterfield was not elusive, but he was surrounded by a dense crowd of aspirants to posts in the Ministry of Information. Last of the queue, I staggered into his office at seven o'clock one evening. I found an exhausted and harassed man: and no wonder. He was Britain's answer to Goebbels, and without plans. I could only feel sorry that I had burdened him with yet another useless interview.

Courteous though weary, he shook me warmly by the hand, and said: 'Ah, you are a man of ideas, and we need them badly.' I asked: 'But *what* ideas?' 'Anything, my dear fellow, anything.' Suddenly I realized that he was repeating a formula: and that he had not the slightest notion who I was. 'Ideas about India?' I queried. 'Certainly about India, if you like.' Suddenly he dived across the room and opened a cupboard, from which a mass of files fell to the floor. 'I think we have something about India here.' 'Shall I write down some ideas about publicity in India, press, radio, cinema, and so on?' I asked. 'Yes, do be a good chap and do that.' I left hurriedly, feeling that he was overdue for a drink and dinner. I was overdue for them myself.

I was told next day that seventy-one Directors of the Ministry of Information had been appointed. (I believe it ~~was~~ really only half a dozen, but anything seemed possible at the time). Among them was Harry Hodson, who became Director of Empire Publicity, or some such title. I wrote, as best I could, my ideas about publicity in India. I doubt if anyone ever read it. I took it to Harry in Belgrave Square, and there discovered quite a large nest of Indian civil servants and businessmen, also writing memoranda. Sour grapes, I don't deny, were not far from me. Hodson, it was clear, did not relish my presence, but he handed me a letter from Waterfield, who, he said, would like to see me at once.

In a taxi I read Waterfield's note. It was courteous, even affable. No doubt, it said, I must be worried about my position, and whether I should return to India or not. He and Lord Perth, it said, 'were trying to fit me in'. Would I come across and see him? I thought to myself; as we passed the Ritz, do I want to be

fitted in? Perhaps I have no alternative, said Piccadilly Circus. The Indian business is over: you have fought too much with the Government of India, and in wartime it will be worse. But, said Shaftesbury Avenue, it will be worse here too: there is sunshine and space in India: here there are only seventy-two directors. Give it all up and buy a nice farm, said Bedford Square. But the towering grey Senate House frowned down at me, and said that I had no money, and money is power, and power was what I liked. All these people scuttling about the polished floors were in the race for money and power, and why should I be left out? My little taste of power had corrupted me.

Waterfield, who now appeared calmer, informed me that Sir Findlater Stewart had been appointed Director General of the Ministry. That, as far as I was concerned, was a stunner. Sir Findlater was a typical civil servant – he was Permanent Secretary at the India Office – and wouldn't care for my type at all. Moreover, I had been at loggerheads with his brother, Sir Thomas, in India. Fate had dealt me a poor hand. Apart from that, I thought (and still think) that the appointment was a queer one. For propaganda you needed a Beaverbrook, a Reith, a Priestly, a Coward – surely not a civil servant. But these thoughts were swept away by Waterfield's next announcement.

He said that they had been considering me for the post of Chief of Broadcasting in the Ministry, but had come to the conclusion that the post must be filled by someone who knew nothing about broadcasting. 'We don't want friction, you see.' I must confess that I had hoped that some such task might fall to me: opportunity fell with a dull thud into the past. Waterfield said that they had appointed Sir Kenneth Lee, the Chairman of Tootal Broadhurst. Later I saw Sir Kenneth, a charming man, and found that he ably fulfilled Waterfield's ideas about broadcasting. He asked me rather tepidly whether I would stay and help him.

It was time, I concluded, to book my passage to India. There at least I could work out the last seven months of my contract, and I should not be idle.

But, before leaving, I started a grand quarrel with the BBC and the India Office. I was convinced that the Germans would start a short-wave service to India, and that, since my own medium-wave transmitters could not compete with it, a similar service must be started by the BBC. This was a complicated engineering matter, which arose chiefly from the fact that, in the absence of any manufacture of cheap medium-wave sets in India,

all sets were geared to short as well as medium wave. Short waves jump considerable distances, and are best recieved from far away. It was obvious that a German service which made fun of the British Raj, would be an instant success. But neither the BBC nor the India Office would have anything to do with it. I persuaded Waldorf Astor to ask a question in the House of Lords. That put everyone into a tizzy. I was summoned to the India Office, and stated my views to an assembly of old gentlemen who had never listened to any radio. They said, with some spleen, that they would cable to the Government of India. I retorted that the Government of India was illiterate about broadcasting: and in due course that Government sent a cable to say that Fielden was, as usual, being an alarmist. The only thing that I could do was to ask Hilda Matheson, who had started an organisation for the recording of English life and English aims, to take a few Indians on her staff. Hilda, as always, did not fail me.

I flew back to India in a mood of dejection and discouragement. It was a strange flight, with windows talc-frosted (in case we were spies, I suppose), and a descent on, of all places, the Sea of Galilee. I did not wonder what Jesus would have thought about his Christian followers: even after 1940 years, his teachings were clear enough.

Chapter Six

The Congress has further laid down that the issue of war and peace for India must be decided by the Indian people, and no outside authority can impose this decision upon them, nor can the Indian people permit their resources to be exploited for Imperialist ends.

STATEMENT BY THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE 1939

TO ESCAPE FROM winter, wartime, austerity and muddle in England to the remote and sunlit places of India was one thing: to discover the political effects of war in India was quite another. The Government of India was entirely chairborne: and, as we all know, nobody is so bellicose as the gentleman behind the comfortable and distant desk. And when civil servants are presented with coloured labels printed with the words 'Very Secret' or 'Most Secret' or 'Top Secret' or even just 'Secret', you may be sure that such labels will be multiplied as recklessly as chips in a game of poker. Very soon it became, more or less, necessary to convene a Committee to decide whether the Viceroy's visit to Baroda for a tiger-hunt should be treated as 'Most Secret' or 'Top Secret'. Since it was obvious, my dear chap, that the Enemy (pretty well engaged in Poland just then) should *never* know how many valves All India Radio held in reserve, or how many staff it employed, all telegrams – whether to say that the Station Director was down with malaria, or a new microphone was required – had to be in cypher. The cypher was complicated enough (at least I thought so) to test any Senior Wrangler: once a month a Top Secret Messenger arrived to present me with a Top Secret Envelope (with five seals, all doubtless opened by the clerks *en route*) which gave me the new *Word* of the month, and by that word alone the cypher could be decyphered. A. S. Bokhari and I alone could know it. The result was that Ahmed Shah and I spent many hilarious (and sometimes angry) nights endeavouring to pluck some meaning from groups of figures which probably meant 'Roof of studio three in need of repair: please sanction expenditure of Rs. 400' but, since the Station Director, poor devil, often got a letter wrong, might come out as 'Goon ka foodle brhaa to seen' or something of the sort: and thus, after

a few hours of hopeless work, we should be obliged to send another (of course encyphered) telegram back, saying 'Don't understand: please repeat' – and I don't doubt that we also got this wrong sometimes. Work was a good deal multiplied. Among other things a meeting was convened at which I was solemnly asked whether I could 'guarantee that none of my artists would send, in songs, plays, or talks, Messages to the Enemy'. I could only reply that I had upwards of 3,000 regularly employed artists on my lists, and that I could not guarantee one of them. Fortunately for me, the Army was present at this meeting, and the Army was entirely reasonable, and even very much on my side. Had it not been so, broadcasting in India might have been shut down for the duration of the war: that had been contemplated. And there was, no doubt, a logical argument for that from a British strategic point of view: if we were to hold India by force for the duration of the war, there could be no sort of certainty (as in a homogeneous country like England) that radio would not be used for seditious ends. And this thought made it necessary to have soldiers to 'guard' the transmitters and studios, and, naturally, to institute 'passes' which everybody forgot or lost, and which in any case were seldom understood by the 'guards' and could very easily be forged. But these and other wartime measures were as nothing compared to the political upheaval.

On the 15th of September 1939, the Indian Congress Working Committee issued a statement which – at any rate to me – seemed reasonable, eloquent, and moving. The gist of it was that if England, as it was said, had embarked on a war 'for freedom', the freedom of India was part of it. I doubt if anyone, reading that statement today, could find anything amiss with it. The Viceroy's reply was long delayed, and, when it eventually materialised, was so vague as to be almost incomprehensible. These two statements threw me into a crusading mania which excluded almost everything else from my mind. I was convinced (as indeed I am still convinced today) that we could have come to terms with Indian nationalism with the happiest results. Our case for refusing independence to India rested on four main points. First, the hoary old argument that India was 'not yet fit for self-government'. Second, that we could, much more easily than under an independent Indian government, attract Indian soldiers by high rates of pay. Third, that an independent Indian government might easily decide to 'go over' to the Enemy. And fourth, Mr Jinnah.

All these arguments were shaky, even if a logical case might be made out for any of them. The first argument was sheer nonsense. India had had four years of the 1935 Act, and the Provincial Governments had functioned very well. There was a large nucleus of trained Indians in the ICS. And only a fool could say that the Viceroy and his Council were more intelligent or capable than the very distinguished men of the Indian Congress. The second argument was more telling. Since the British Raj had left the 700,000 villages of India in a state of misery and near-starvation, it was obvious enough that regular pay and good conditions would attract a large percentage of India's millions, and that they would care no more what they were fighting for than a mason would care what kind of architecture his daily stint of bricks was making. (And indeed, the Indian forces fought with extreme gallantry during the war, and never, as far as I could make out when I talked to them, had the remotest idea what they were fighting for.) A good case could be made out for the third argument, but it was based on a misconception of the Indian point of view. India was not friendly to Britain, while Britain held her in subjection: it did not follow that India welcomed subjection by other countries. Gandhi, of course, might well have wished to turn India into a larger Switzerland, and to welcome all nations as guests but none as rulers: at the same time, he, like other Congress leaders, was powerfully affected by English language and English habits, and was not in the least deluded about German or Japanese aims. Nor were any of the others. It is worth remembering that Nehru was the one and only statesman who, passing through Rome, deliberately rejected an invitation from Mussolini. So far as I know, there was not a Congress leader who would have 'gone over to the enemy', with the sole exception of Subash Chandra Bose, who came to an unhappy end in Japan. The fourth and last argument was the worst of all. Jinnah had presented the British Government with the perfect instrument of Divide and Rule. Once a Congress leader, he had quarrelled with the Congress and made himself a Saviour of Muslims against Hindus. India could not have independence, according to Jinnah, until the races were divided. This suited the British Raj perfectly. I knew Jinnah well, and the remarks made by Mr Attlee, in a television interview in 1958 (which caused such indignation in Pakistan) seem to me perfectly just. He was an agreeable, well-dressed, shrewd and capable small-town lawyer, and he was very little more. Circumstances presented him with a unique opportunity to climb the

ladder of fame on the rungs of a religion to which he was completely indifferent: and he climbed. I did not dislike Jinnah: on the contrary, I found him delightful. But to erect a great mausoleum to him, to which thousands ascend on bended knees, calling him a Saint, is about as ludicrous as to do the same for, say, Sir Roger Casement – who, probably, was as good and sincere a man in his way. Jinnah, through egoism and self-importance, did great harm. And the British Raj did no less. The massacres of 1947 were prepared in 1939.

I was in an awkward position. Whatever my political beliefs were, I could not use All India Radio to further them. That would have been treason (whatever treason may mean). I don't think it even occurred to me to do so. It would hardly have been practicable: it would certainly have been dishonest. At the same time I felt that it was urgently necessary that some sort of bridge of understanding should be made between the British Government and Indian nationalists. And there were some weak signs that this was not impossible. Sir Andrew Clow asked me (and this was revolutionary) whether I could 'bring Nehru to see him'. I arranged this, and, as far as I can remember, Edward Thompson drove us to have tea in the Clow house. That tea was a terrible business. Lady Clow made bright conversation about the weather, and Nehru sat looking incredibly 'gloomy, and wearing, I can't help thinking purposely, just about the most threadbare old *ajkehan* I have ever seen. It was obvious that a cat and dog would have got on better than Clow and Nehru. And yet, today, I am as sure as I was then that if England had risen nobly to her opportunity, not only should we have had a far more powerful (and less troublesome) war ally in India, but also a much greater friend in later times. At the time of which I am writing, Sir Stafford Cripps came out to India, and appeared to feel exactly as I did. But, of course, he was then in the Opposition. When, in 1942, he came out again as a Member of the Government, he *said* the same things, but either failed or was not permitted to act upon them. In a broadcast from New Delhi on March 30th 1942, Sir Stafford said, among other things: 'it is for the Indian people, *and not for any outside authority*, to discuss and decide their future constitution. We shall *look on with deep interest* and hope that your wisdom will guide you truly in this great adventure.' But in fact, since the British Government never believed that 'their wisdom' would guide them truly, unless they decided to remain a subversive colony, these words meant nothing: perhaps Cripps thought

that they did. In any case the opportunity was missed, and India had to go the way of massacre and partition. And so, between 1939 and 1943, I became obsessed by the idea of immediate Indian independence, and this greatly affected and confused my thoughts and actions – confused, because, as was natural, I was no less obsessed by the necessity that England should win the war. It seemed to me that there was little to choose between, say, Hitler in Sudetenland and England in India. I wished that we could be wiser.

Suddenly, as I had – not with great intelligence – prophesied, Germany started up a powerful programme in Indian languages. The Germans had a beautiful and easy target. They could make common cause with the Nationalists, laugh at the ‘freedom’ which we failed to give, caricature the Viceroy and Government, make fun of the topheavy bureaucracy, and point to all the muddles of Mr Chamberlain. The effect in India was instantaneous and smashing. Indians quite naturally found German rudeness (and, I must say, German music) much more entertaining than what All India Radio could provide. The Viceroy and his Council were alarmed, and the first thing that they did was to cable London to the effect that Sir Zafrullah Khan, who was there, should make an immediate answer on the BBC. That was the measure of their ignorance of radio. Obviously Zafrullah, witty man though he was, couldn’t replace, or even answer, a daily programme. So eventually – and perhaps it was my one triumph in India – a cable went forth from Delhi, drafted by Maxwell, the Home Secretary, which contained the extraordinary words; ‘Fielden was right, and we were wrong,’ and asked for an immediate regular Indian service from the BBC. There followed an acrimonious correspondence, because the BBC was not prepared to abandon its position. But it had to yield. It then became a question of how an Indian section should be constituted. I had by then got one or two trained Indians with Hilda Matheson, so a nucleus was there. But who was to command it? The BBC sent to the Viceroy a list composed entirely of retired Indian Governors, hardly any one of whom had ever listened to a radio. Even the Viceroy was appalled. He asked me whether I would go. That was a 64,000 dollar question. I knew that I should not be welcomed: I had, so to speak, started all the trouble. But what could I do? I said that, if he thought fit, I would go to organise it, but that I thought it should be controlled by an Indian. A long cable was sent by the Government of India to the BBC, to the effect that the Government of India

considered that I was the one suitable Englishman: as indeed I was. The BBC refused flatly. This, after what I had done – however little – for broadcasting both in England and in India, came as a shock to me. I had not realized that I was so hated. The Viceroy sent for me again, and said that, ‘as the BBC seemed so keen on titles’, we might perhaps find somebody titled in India who would work with me. I agreed, though with a sinking heart. Sir Malcolm Darling was summoned to Delhi. Sir Malcolm was (and is) a man of great charm, intelligence, and kindness: unfortunately – though I did not realize it at the time, – he has a strong jingoistic streak which at times makes him subscribe to the policy of ‘my country right or wrong’. He had had a splendid career in India, and had written two remarkable books about it: nobody could say that he did not know India, and nobody could say that he didn’t love it. But at the bottom of his heart he believed (so it seems to me, and he has since been to stay with me in Italy) that India should be governed by the British: and this was a fatal gap between us. In our conversations with the Viceroy, I did not tumble to this: I thought Sir Malcolm enchanting, and on his side he assured me that he would leave programmes to me. And so, not without great reluctance on the part of the BBC, it was agreed that the section should be run with Sir Malcolm as Head, and with me as Editor. I was, of course, a colossal fool to agree. But I was bemused, as I have said, by the idea of Indian independence, and I thought that I might serve it in this way. Quite apart from that, I saw no future for myself in the fights which would undoubtedly occur in India. Reasons are seldom clear-cut: I daresay I had many selfish interests. In any case, this put *finis* to my Indian days.

I left India late in April 1940. The signs were threatening enough. Our KLM air-liner could go no further than Naples: and Italy was on the brink of war. I had tried, so far as I was able, to keep my departure from India secret: once divulged, it would inevitably involve me in parties, presentations, and emotional occasions, sincere or insincere, which I wished to avoid. Nevertheless, the Station Directors of AIR clubbed together to present me with an imaginative and touching gift: and at Lahore Rashid Ahmed and Din Tyabji (now a seasoned Ambassador of India) gave me the most beautiful party I have ever attended in the Shalimar Gardens, with millions of tapers twinkling along the still lakes. I travelled to Karachi alone. No trumpets sounded for me there, nor, as you can guess, on the other side.

Chapter Seven

Poor fellow! He has done his best, but what does a fish's best come to when the fish is out of water?

SAMUEL BUTLER - THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

It seems to me . . . that the character of war has changed in our time . . . We have made it not merely a means to something, but once we are in it and end in itself - a religion and a god, in whose service anything is proper except to lose it - a very jealous god to whom we are prepared to sacrifice everything, even the very principles for which we are fighting. . . So at the end we are a little disillusioned to find ourselves suddenly without any god at all, only a dead war

HOWARD CHURCH - AN EPITAPH FOR LOVE

LONDON IN 1940. The black-out. Is it really necessary to stumble around like this, and hide behind black curtains? How much, really, is the value of supposed safety against the depreciation of psychological depression? Daylight raids don't seem frightening. Is it supposed that, even in a lighted city, aeroplanes at 20,000 feet can hit Downing Street or Buckingham Palace? And what matter if they did? Wasn't there some sort of argument in favour of lighting your cities gaily, and dowsing your factories? And then, evacuees all over the countryside, making hell of it and ruining it: and getting sick of it. Food gradually getting worse: inevitable that, in an island with too many people and too few ships: but still, not gay. Dunkirk and a sense of despair. Blood and tears and toil and sweat. Backs to the wall. Growing hypocrisy. The blitz. Squalor. Noisy sleepless nights. Churchill talking from Agincourt. Long dusty office days: evenings with the stirrup pump and the ambulance. Not really a way in which one would have chosen to spend a part of this brief journey from cradle to grave. And what was it all in aid of? Hitler and his gang were international highwaymen, no doubt: but you don't make the roads safer by tearing them all up, and killing most of the road-

users. Hitler, it might be said – probably inaccurately – had killed a million Jews: however that might be, the situation isn't improved by killing ten million Gentiles. Wars are futile. Who can like a world ruled by fear and bad temper?

Nevertheless a lot of people did, and perhaps always will. The English, when roused, are a bellicose race. Many for whom peace was a dull and dreary routine, with few rewards, found a new glamour in life. Purpose, which had been vacillating in the twenties and thirties, found a new aim. Win the war: quite simple. Don't bother about anything else. Eric Maschwitz, over a cocktail at the Café Royal, said to grumbling me: 'But, Lionel, it's *wonderful* to live at such a time! The Great Blank Page of the Future! Think of it!' I thought of it, and was not comforted.

My assignment to the BBC, which lasted for just six months, was exactly what, had I not been such a dunce, I might have expected it to be. The authorities had not wanted me and did not like me. I could not admire 'Freddy' Ogilvie, the new Director-General. I had never been friendly with Sir Stephen Tallents, now Director of Overseas Programmes. However, these did not greatly matter: they were generally lost in Olympian clouds. What mattered more was that I felt like an unwelcome stranger in the BBC. The staff had increased and changed enormously since I had gone to India: once I had known nearly all of them: now I knew surprisingly few. I felt rather as if I had been transferred from the Travellers Club to the RAC. It wasn't exactly bad: but it was strange. And I, probably, was regarded as a former Director-General, who would put on airs: perhaps I did put on airs. (And who cared twopence about India, anyway?) As second-in-command of a tiny Indian section, I was a nobody: and it's quite difficult for any of us to come down to being a Nobody, if we have been a Somebody Somewhere. Maybe it is very good for us. After a good deal of unpleasant fighting, Zulfagar and I managed to start a service to India just before the Hitler offensive of May 1940. We had made a careful study of the German broadcasts to India, and the means of offsetting them. Of course, when you are on the losing side, your propaganda is always lame, as became evident in the German broadcasts at the end of the war. The Indian staff in London, however, knew their India: and I still think that the service which we started then was on the right lines – which does not, of course, mean that it had anything to do with BBC dignity and restraint. It was rude and lively. But when

Sir Malcolm Darling, who had been dallying in India, reached England about ten days later, he made it clear that this would not do at all. And who shall blame him? Rightly or wrongly, he thought that English broadcasting should be courteous and non-committal: and he wished to stand well with Authority, as represented by Ogilvie, Tallents, and the India Office. I was the nigger in the woodpile. Even the Indian staff – aware that I was a much lesser person in England than in India, and rather enjoying the excitements of London – did not greatly care about the quality of our programmes. I became a useless fool, and in November 1940 I resigned. Mr Ogilvie – or was he Sir Frederick? – said: ‘I am afraid I have no option but to accept your resignation.’ That was that. Philip Jordan, a friendly soul, wrote a searing article in the *News Chronicle*, saying that I was right and Ogilvie wrong: Harold Nicolson said that I was ‘much too passionate’; and so I passed into oblivion.

One small incident, which probably affected my future, occurred in these months. A certain Major Harrison had been imported into the BBC as ‘War Office Adviser’ – or something of the sort. I was infuriated by the very idea of War Office Advisers. I was rude to Cecil Harrison on every possible occasion. The ruder I was, the more he liked me. I cannot imagine how he tolerated me at all. Perhaps I amused him: certainly the feeblest joke might have seemed funny in Pompous Portland Place. People are fond of saying that the BBC did a magnificent job in the war: but, with the exception of Tommy Handley and the Brains Trust, there were few outstanding programmes. The Indian service, on which I had pinned so many hopes, degenerated into a bad Hindustani translation of English news bulletins (incomprehensible to most Indians) with nice dashes of English music-hall. Am I biased? I am.

On the day after I departed, unwept and unhonoured, from the BBC, I joined the Ministry of Food, towards which Howard Marshall had been insistently beckoning me for some time. I had a crazy idea that, as a not very convinced belligerent, I might do better at alleviating hardship than in creating it. It proved to be an uninspiring affair. Lord Woolton was pleasant and at times charming: at the time of my arrival he was considerably frightened by Churchill, who used to send him the usual ‘half-sheets of notepaper’ saying that ‘the British working man must have his steak’, while at the same time allowing Beaverbrook to seize all the available storage space in the country for aeroplane odds and

ends, thus keeping about fifty food ships waiting in the Bristol Channel. Woolton must have had a difficult time. But he was never criticized. In his memoirs he says that this was due to the fact that he had lunch at the Ritz with Lord Kemsley. I very much doubt it. As far as I know (which of course may not be very far) it was due to the fact that the Ministry of Food paid the press some £10,000 a week for food advertisements, and no paper would risk this lovely advertising revenue by criticism. When, later, I wrote a 'profile' of Woolton for the *Observer*, I mentioned this fact, but he would not let me print it. Quite right: in his place I should have done the same. In the Ministry of Food I gathered, among other things, an odd assortment of people, including Lilian Braithwaite, Jeanne de Casalis and Evelyn Laye, who cheerfully got up at 2 a.m. to travel uncomfortably to hideous places and proclaim with hideous untruth that a carrot a day made you see perfectly in pitch-black darkness, or that a Woolton Pie was the ultimate triumph of a cordon-bleu chef. I also had the good fortune to meet Lettice Cooper, the novelist, who had the unenviable task of answering the multitude of letters which poured in to Lord Woolton. ('Lord Woolton is greatly concerned about the state of your canary, and recommends...') She was about the only person in the whole great building who had and kept an excellent sense of humour, and she more or less saved my life and reason, and turned into a lifelong friend. I scarcely know how she saved her own reason at times: among her letters I remember one which included a long and scholarly argument for throwing into the sea the bodies of people killed in the blitz, thus fattening the fish and improving Britain's food supplies. I drew in the charming Margery Locket and Pamela Frankau to work with her and it was quite a gay party. But it seemed a more and more futile one to me, and after six months, I had enough bad temper, and a small excuse, to get myself out. The excuse was provided by Robin Whitworth, a charming and intelligent person whom the BBC had thrown out for being a Conscientious Objector, and who applied to me for a job. I thought that the Ministry of Food was the very place for Conscientious Objectors, but Lord Woolton did not. So I swept out in a fury. On the next day I joined the Ministry of Aircraft Production, where my friend Stephen King-Hall had been roped in to do a report on what I can only call the Mental State of Workers in Factories, with recommendations as to An Increase of Productivity. (I seem to have heard these words quite often.) He wanted me to do some

running around which he had not time to do himself. But I cannot now go on with ministries, which are fearful things at the best of times: and I shall pay a visit to my aunts. My aunts are really much better fun than any ministry.

At this time, 1940, I had three Fielden aunts living. They were Una, who was eighty-five, Sarah (whom you have met before) who was seventy-eight, and Beatrice who was a mere seventy-five. They all had that peculiar toughness which seems to be characteristic of mid-Victorian England. Was it upbringing, good constitution, absence of worry, or what? Una was destined to live to a hundred, and both the others far into their nineties. They were neither very rich nor very poor: I imagine they each had about £1,200 a year. Sarah and Beatrice had been married: Una was a robust and unrepentant spinster. Una had an exquisite little house in Alexander Square: Beatrice had a flat in Albert Gate: Sarah lived at Eastbourne, where she worked madly on a beautiful garden (and could exhaust any guest) and did a lot of quiet good works. All three got direct hits from Hitler, and emerged scatheless and quite unshaken. When Aunt Una's house was reduced to rubble, and she had been extricated from the ruins, she merely said: 'My word, that was the hell of a bang!' Beatrice was considerably annoyed, and said that Hitler must be made to pay for her Egyptian collection. Neither of them could be induced to leave London. As for Sarah, she had returned from Sunday morning service and was reading in her drawing-room when the bomb fell on the house. Her cook and maid were taken to hospital, but, although the windows of the drawing-room and all the glass-fronted book-cases were blown out, Aunt Sally received not a scratch, and, politely declining the neighbours' offers of assistance and lunch, made herself cheese sandwiches in the shattered kitchen. When I saw her that evening in London, and asked her how on earth she had escaped, she said tranquilly 'My dear, I think it was the Service: we had a particularly nice Service this morning.' She moved without any fuss into a new house, concentrated with delight on a new garden, and was very pleased with the price she got for the ruins.

Una and Beatrice, homeless, presented me with a problem, and in my spare moments I ran around hunting for a flat for them. They had to live together: that was inescapable, though neither relished the idea. Flat-hunting was difficult, if only because one had to make as sure as possible that the premises were not going

to be requisitioned by the armed forces or the civil service. Indeed, in spite of all my care, they were ousted in a month from a flat I had taken for them in Hyde Park Gate. Eventually I established them in an attic flat in Sloane Street, and in this they lived happily until they died in the fifties. I used to go to see them very constantly. I used to find the flat frightening. At the height of the blitz, bombs seemed to be rushing about all over the roof. Una would insist on playing backgammon, and, when I ducked under the table, would say 'Your move - what on earth are you looking for?' Beatrice would discuss Browning or Bergson, and lift surprised eyebrows if I jumped at a particularly loud bang. 'Aren't you feeling well, dear?' These old ladies were certainly a tonic.

Some ten years later, Beatrice, then eighty-five (Una being a gay ninety-five), wrote some memoirs of her life. I tried, but lamentably failed, to get them published: and I was sad about this, not only because it would have pleased her, but also because I thought them striking. My own writings may share the same fate, but if they do not, I think it is not out of place to include some of hers here. They are an authentic description of a life now almost forgotten.

'I was born in 1866 - a long, long time ago. In the years that have passed, I have lived through peace and great wars, and a bloodless revolution.

No wonder if we are all dazed and puzzled and have lost some of our balance in all these happenings. Let us hope that our suffering will eventually be for the good of mankind, though we may well regret the passing of so much that was good and noble in the past and the greater freedom we then possessed, which has perhaps gone for ever.

In the days of my youth we could travel all over the continent without passports or visas, and could take what money we needed for the journey without question, and though we had to pass through the Customs House on arrival, the examination was conducted with a friendly courtesy and apparently an inborn belief that most of us were honest folk.

We were, I think, more friendly with foreigners, in those days, than we are now, in spite of all the talking; we may have laughed at each other's manners and customs, but we believed in each other's sincerity where now we are full of doubt and suspicion. Should we believe then that in the New World people are less

honest than they were? An unpleasant thought that points to the downfall of civilization rather than to its upraising, for honesty is the very life-blood of all friendship and understanding.

Rationing may be a necessity but under it the consumer has lost all his rights. Anything may be palmed off on him and he has no redress. The shops are not responsible for what they sell, and the Food Ministry is a bogy of indifference. A young butcher once offered me some bad looking beef, and when I remonstrated with him, he said "Take it or leave it."

"Then I will leave it," I replied. His surprise at my answer was ludicrous. He literally goggled with astonishment. He was of course young, and had not lived in the days when customers had still some rights and expected good service and civility.

Our happiness lies in our everyday freedom more than our politicians seem to realize. We should quote them the wise words of Chang in *Lost Horizon*.

"Ah, but you see we believe that to govern perfectly it is necessary to avoid governing too much."

These words should be printed in large type and hung up in the House of Commons for all the members to read and re-read.

My father was one of three brothers, rich cotton spinners living on the borders of Lancashire and Yorkshire. My grandfather was John Fielden, who carried the ten-hours bill through the House of Commons in the teeth of violent opposition. A man of great integrity and conviction and a stickler to the end. It was the first act of Parliament ever passed to help the workers. And let us remember that the ten-hours bill was only for the little children working in the mills and not for the men and women. A state of white slavery for children that it seems almost impossible to realize in these days.

I have in my possession the medal that was struck to commemorate the event; it is a small silver medal about the size of half-a-crown, with the head of Queen Victoria on one side and an engraving of a man and woman and two children in a room together on the other, representing a home perhaps.

There is an old family story that when the ten-hours bill was at last passed, my grandfather returned to Manchester, and rushing into the office where his brother, Joshua, sat at work, exclaimed: "I have finished it, Joshua, I have finished it!"

To which my great uncle Joshua, an astute and portly old gentleman, replied: "Finished it, John? Finished it? You mean you have only just begun it."

What my grandfather did in Parliament to further the cause, Richard Oastler did among the people, speaking and encouraging the workers to fight against the tyranny of their masters. He was called the Factory King for his labours and was adored by the workers. He must have been a very engaging and exceptional personality. When his wife died, a niece went to look after him until he died. As a dear little old lady she would sometimes come and stay with my mother, and as a child I used to enjoy some of the stories she told me of those exciting times. One story that remains fixed in my memory was of a great meeting Oastler organised at York where thousands of workers were to assemble on a certain day: some of them walking twenty and thirty miles to attend it, and how he promised them bread and beer on their arrival and how unfortunately their enemies, the mill owners, hearing of the meeting and the promise of food, bought up all the bread and beer in the town, so that when the weary marchers reached their meeting place, tired after their long march and many drenched to the skin, for it had been a stormy night, they were naturally furious to find the promised food not forthcoming. When Oastler arrived at the hotel he was told of what happened and advised by his helpers to keep away from the meeting, as in the present temper of the workers they feared he might be lynched. He refused to listen to such advice and went at once to the platform where he received a great ovation.

In the meantime he sent his helpers to the neighbouring towns and villages for the much needed bread and beer which eventually was found and distributed. At the end of the great meeting, Oastler, instead of riding home as he had intended, decided he would march at the head of the workers on their long tramp back. What as a child I used to listen for was the end of the story as told by his niece, who always finished the recital in the same words: "When we took off his socks we took off the soles of his feet too." A rather lurid description of bleeding and blistered feet which of course filled me with admiration for the hero.

I also have in my possession a letter from Richard Oastler written to my grandfather, John Fielden. It was written in December 1847, six months after the passing of the bill. It seems to have been written on account of a movement on the part of the mill-owners to try and repeal the ten-hours act. He writes: "And so, they are at work again! I gave them credit for more sense! Never mind, if we must have another try, I shall, if I meddle, be for *Eight* . . . Remember it is not I who have provoked

the new strife, it is the mill-owners. If I do start I will hoist the banner of *eight Hours* and God will speed the right."

It was a great fight for a good cause and naturally I am proud to think that my grandfather, although a mill-owner like the rest, saw the evil of this child-slavery and determined to better it, if he could not abolish it. He installed the ten-hours day in his own mills long before it became law, determined to do what he thought was right if it was a monetary loss. Perhaps I should add as a moral to the story that John Fielden was a Unitarian – anathema to the Churches, yet it was he who did the work of mercy and not the other mill-owners who, no doubt, in those days attended Church regularly with their well-dressed families.

My ancestors were working men, spinning the cotton on hand-loom in their cottages like the rest of their neighbours. Evidently they were able and reliable spinners and honest hardworking men. When my greatgrandfather had finished a bale he strapped it on his back and walked twenty miles across the moors to the Manchester market. He was soon known there for his good spinning and honesty and the buyers would give him more for his bales than the other less competent spinners.

It was natural, perhaps, that the other spinners should suggest that he should sell all their bales of cotton for them. Whilst they would supply a trap to drive the bales to market, he was to sell them there. He tried to do so, but soon found himself in trouble as the spinning varied so much in quality and in the end he suggested to his fellow workers that they should all work together in a barn or room, so that he might see that the work was done properly, and help those who needed help in their work, so that they might do it more perfectly and more thoroughly, and thus took the first step towards the family cotton mills.

Honesty and commonsense seem to have been the great gifts of my ancestors. Gifts making for firm foundations on which to build. Commonsense not only teaches us how best to make use of the present, but seems to have a mysterious power to see into the future and its coming necessities.

To imagine we can build up a great new civilization on lying, stealing and murder, even if done for the State, as some would have us believe, is foolish thinking and as impossible of lasting success as trying to build on bog or sand. The end will be ruin however fair it looks to start with. Truth and wisdom are the only lasting foundations on which to build, nationally or individually, with any hope of success, and let us add the love of free-

dom to cement the whole together, and we shall all be able to rejoice at the result.'

The Fielden family, to judge from what history I have of them, must have been an obstinate and dogged lot. From about 1640 onward they were Quakers, and in 1683 Joshua Fielden of Inchfield, Rochdale, was fined for absence from church to the extent of fifteen shillings and fourpence: in the following year the church seized his bedding, worth five shillings: and in 1685 he was fined again and 'goods were taken, viz. a pewter and a Bible, worth seventeen shillings, to pay the fine.' They remained Quakers nevertheless. My aunts were clearly in the same tradition. They held strong beliefs: I was muddled.

So now, in 1941, I became a sort of Inspector of Factories, a situation which would have made my greatgrandfather howl in his grave, I should think. I knew absolutely nothing about factories. I travelled up and down the country and hated it, because train-services were bad, and factories almost always difficult to get at. It also seemed to me that Hitler decided to bomb whatever town I was in, and the Southampton blitz in particular reduced me to almost gibbering terror. The factories themselves seemed to me nightmarish: they were mostly lit by what was called 'daylight lighting' which made everybody look as if they had severe jaundice and a hangover. People were reduced to automata. I remember especially a woman whose job it was to examine the insides of gas shells. These were coated with a flesh-coloured preparation, and the coating had to be perfect. They were rolled down to her on an inclined plane, and she rapidly examined, and passed or rejected, them. I asked her to let me do it for a few minutes. Soon I staggered back, feeling that I was in a dream of whirling intestines. I asked her 'How long have you been doing this?' 'Two years.' 'You like it?' 'Suits me fine.' But others were not so well suited. After all the blah about our wonderful workers, it was odd to see that at 5.10 p.m. (hours of work being till 5.30) everyone was queueing up to go to the greyhound racing, or what have you. Overtime my foot. The British worker, as I saw him then, couldn't have cared less. It was also very noticeable that, on the whole, women did much better than men. They were much spryer, looked better, and seemed to do their jobs easily. The men looked haggard, and were sullen. I talked to many managers and shop stewards, and three points emerged clearly. First, a loss of pride in craftsmanship: repetitious

jobs which he did not understand bored the worker. Second, much more interest in higher wages than in the war. Third, the ability of women to run a machine with half their mind, and think of a new hat, a dinner, and the children: and the anxiety of men to make machines do something different and more interesting. And of course there was a lot more too – transport, housing, canteens, temperatures, lectures, entertainments, and so on. An old story. A report was written. At that moment the Minister changed, and the report went straight into the waste-paper basket. Stephen left, and I remained suspended in a kind of vacuum. Sir Archibald Rowlands, the Permanent Secretary, to whom I took my troubles, said ‘My dear Lionel, you have a nice office overlooking the Thames, and a nice salary, and nothing much to do. Why worry?’ Archie was a dear fellow, but I couldn’t sit and stare at the Thames. I got myself out, and swore that I would do no more bureaucratic work. But what was I to do? Nobody wanted me. And quite rightly. In this world of war I was useless.

India still sat in the forefront of my mind, and I somehow found myself a member of an ‘Indian Freedom Campaign’ under Fenner Brockway. Fenner is a dear soul, a champion of lost causes, well-meaning and (to me) very confused. I need hardly say (since it always happens to Fenner) that the Indian Freedom Campaign had no money at all, and even less organisation. Fenner’s ideas about Equality reach a point which is hilariously funny and very tragic. When we decided (after a hideous struggle about finance) to employ a secretary, and various ladies were due to be interviewed, Fenner said to me ‘I am so afraid that they will feel *embarrassed* if I sit behind a desk: so let us take our chairs into the middle of the room, and talk to them there.’ The ladies were considerably startled, and not at all, as Fenner hoped, at ease. I was now sent to make speeches about Indian Freedom all over England: but for the most part in extraordinary (at least to me) places like Newark, Grantham, Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle. I was falling rapidly in the social scale. Since we had no money, I had to travel cheap, and I was ‘put up’ in the various towns, not by the working class, which might have been amusing, but by rather dreary commercial travellers, who were indeed very kind to me, but with whom I could find no common ground. The nadir was reached in some frightful town (I cannot remember where) in which I talked in a Wesleyan chapel to an audience of thirteen: and, after expounding at great length and (as I thought) with unanswerable logic the case for Indian Freedom, I was faced

by an old gentleman with no teeth who rose and demanded: 'You aint arsting us to believe that Indians can govern theirselves, ay you?' However, this idiotic stumping did teach me to 'think on my feet': and presently I was taken up by the Commonwealth Party under Sir Richard Acland, as their 'Eastern Expert'. The Commonwealth Party had some nice people in it, such as Vernon Bartlett and Tom Wintringham, and for a moment I believed that it might be our salvation. Under its auspices I spoke to a large meeting at the Central Hall, Westminster: which nearly frightened the pants off me. Soon, however, the party fell to pieces – perhaps Acland was not quite the ideal leader. But all this speaking resulted in an approach to me by Martin Secker, who suggested that I should write a book on India. I did not at all want to do so, because all writing is a tribulation to me: but I had got myself into a groove, and thought that I must not refuse. In a haze of gin I ground out a book which was called *Beggar My Neighbour*. I was an ignoramus about publication, and when Martin Secker asked me whether I would prefer a de luxe edition, which would take a year to print, or a cheap one which would take three months, I opted for the latter. I did not realize that at a time when 'austerity' made all books look cheap, a cheap edition would look terrible. Secker by that time did not like the book, and did not spend much money on advertising it. It was so badly printed that it was almost unreadable – at least, that is what many correspondents told me. Nevertheless, the reviews of it were – to me – startlingly long and startlingly good. There were some exceptions. Eric Blair, otherwise George Orwell, who had a particular dislike of me, wrote no less than 6,000 words about it in *Horizon*, tearing it to bits and calling his article 'Gandhi in Mayfair'. I thought that this was a bit too much, and asked the Editor, Cyril Conolly, whether I could write 6,000 words in reply. Cyril, a very fair man, agreed: and I did my best to stab Orwell in all his vulnerable points. He then asked Cyril for another 6,000 words to reply to me, but Cyril, quite rightly, had had enough. I made over the proceeds of the book, if any, to the Indian Freedom Campaign, and to this day I haven't the vaguest idea of the number of copies sold. It was banned by the Government of India, which I thought flattering: later it was reprinted in India by an American firm, but I never saw a copy of that edition.

These peculiar activities suddenly flowered in a surprising way. Waldorf Astor, the proprietor of *The Observer*, had a

quarrel with J. L. Garvin on a Wednesday, and Garvin left. Lord Astor rang me up and asked me if I would write the main article in *The Observer* in his stead, beginning on the following Sunday. I must explain, however, that the invitation was not quite what it – at first – sounded. Obviously Lord Astor had to have somebody to write, and, equally obviously, he did not want to take any sudden and binding decision. I was a useful pawn which could be played without much risk: moreover, the Cripps Mission was about to leave for India, and my knowledge came in handy. Limits to my future were quickly set. It was made clear to me that, when the war was over, David Astor would naturally inherit the Editorial Chair: also that in the meantime there would be an acting Editor. This was at first Geoffrey Crowther of *The Economist*, secondly Wilson Harris of *The Spectator*, and thirdly the dramatic critic of *The Observer*, Ivor Brown, who eventually (and surely it was an even stranger appointment than mine) became Editor until David took over. In spite of all this careful hedging, the invitation came as an immense bolt from the blue. I was much more appalled than pleased. This now seems strange to me. I had written a good many articles for *The New Statesman* and other papers in BBC days: in India I had grown accustomed to making speeches and writing articles by the yard: in England I had spoken a good deal, and written a book. Writing for a Sunday newspaper should not have appalled me. I imagine that it was a fear of Garvin. I had known him, and read his articles, it seemed to me, from my childhood on: he appeared to me a great figure with an encyclopaedic mind. I did not see how I could possibly rival him. I foresaw him (and indeed everyone else) laughing at my absurdities.

Work on *The Observer* was quite different from anything that I had expected. I never saw the acting Editors. The staff was much smaller than I had thought possible, and it always seemed to me a miracle that the paper came out at all. As far as I was concerned, I had one assistant, who was Miss Barbara Ward. She has since attained fame, but if you think that she wrote my articles for me, you are mistaken. She seemed to me then a mousy little person, and if I asked her to get hold of a contributor or write a factual note, she obliged with great efficiency. And, to do her justice, she never attempted to interfere in the smallest degree with my ideas or articles, and was entirely charming to work with.

The week on *The Observer* followed a regular pattern. On Monday I lunched with Waldorf Astor at (God knows why, but he chose it) the Holborn Restaurant. In his courteous way – he was one of the gentlest and most endearing men I ever knew – he would say, always, very much the same thing. ‘My dear Audax,’ (that was the pen-name they had given me) ‘you wrote beautifully yesterday. I especially liked etc, etc, etc . . . But don’t you think you could outwrite Scrutator? I think you could. I should be so pleased if you would.’ (Scrutator was the military expert of *The Sunday Times*.) In some distress – for I longed to please him – I would reply: ‘But, Lord Astor, I know nothing, and care less, about military matters: and I think that *The Observer* would be so wise if it concentrated upon what is to happen *after* the war.’ But I could not convince him. On Tuesday David would either see me or ring me up, and develop some rather Utopian attitude of his own: and from this it almost invariably followed that I was visited on Wednesday by some hush-hush individual (an escaped prisoner-of-war, a German refugee, an American observer) who confided to me various things which seemed to me to make nonsense. On Thursday I had to attend the solemn meeting of bigwigs who made up *The Observer’s* Board of Governors, and each of them would have a different suggestion to make for the next number. On Friday, thoroughly baffled and confused, I wrote my article or articles: oddly enough, I found that the best place to do this was lying on the ground in St James’s Park. I had the impression, rightly or wrongly, that with people moving round me, I had a sense of what England was thinking. On Saturday David arranged a dinner-party, perhaps with Mr Anthony Eden, to keep us all in the swim. And so, for a time, it went on.

I had one delightful compliment. Bernard Shaw, on a week-end visit to Cliveden, said to Lord Astor: ‘I don’t know who your Audax is, but he writes much better than Garvin ever did.’ Lord Astor, disappointingly, did not divulge my identity: but I treasured the remark. Nevertheless I was bound to fail in the end. I was not the right person, and I had not the necessary staying-power. It came to pass that I wrote a spiteful article about a Churchillian visit to Moscow. I don’t think it was stupid: but it was undoubtedly tactless. From that moment I was in retreat. Waldorf Astor was much too nice to sack me: but gradually I did less and less. I went out not with a bang or even a whimper, but

in a sort of polite diminuendo. I remain grateful to *The Observer* for an interesting experience.

I was now (somewhere about the beginning of 1943) in a bad situation. I had, it seemed, tried almost everything and failed everywhere. I was forty-seven, unfit and almost penniless, and I took myself off to the family abode at Kineton. The house was half-converted to a hospital, and the family were living in a part of it which had been so badly divided as to be almost unmanageable. My sister, a grass widow while her husband was fighting, had abandoned her lovely house and come to live in a cottage on the estate. She very efficiently looked after such things as the chickens, goats, rabbits, and what garden remained. My father had developed cancer: but, since the doctors thought that an operation at his age would be too risky, was kept unaware of it. The only servants in the house were Clark the butler and Mrs Wellard the cook, a woman of great personality and dry humour, who cooked beautifully but was not going to stir out of her kitchen for anyone. From the room where we fed to the kitchen was fifty paces of dark stone corridors. Clark, though very willing, was usually in a haze of gin. Someone, therefore, had to lay tables, change plates, wheel trolleys along the corridors, and wash up. I was amazed to discover the etiquette which ruled – still ruled – behind the baize doors. Glass and silver had to be washed and stored in, and fetched from, the butlers pantry: Mrs Wellard would throw it out if it reached the kitchen. China went to the kitchen. The rule was immutable. My stepmother and I would take turns at washing-up. Our treasure and terror was the last, the very last, murderously thin port-wine glass used by my father. He simply did not like port out of any other glass. Stupid perhaps, but there it was. I rather share his feelings. Wine is better in a beautiful glass: tea is undrinkable in a thick mug. Anyway, with my stepmother and me, it became a case of 'It's your turn to wash it' – 'No, it's yours' – and when Clark, thoroughly ginned-up, finally broke it, we were, although sorry for my father, greatly relieved. On the whole it was, I suppose, the sort of crazy family life which was common in England at that time. With a dumb despair, I felt myself slithering into a dependent waster with a few domestic chores. There seemed to be no future at all for me.

In that, however, I was mistaken.

The brief War Office letter, enquiring whether I would be 'will-

ing to accept a post as major in connection with the administration of occupied territory', did not even faintly thrill me. I did not altogether believe it; after my experience of the Government of India, two Ministries, the BBC and The Observer, and with my reputation as a seditious pacifist and author of an angry little book, it seemed plumb crazy that I should join the British Army in any capacity whatsoever. I wrote an affirmative reply and went to wheel in the trolley for lunch.

I had written an affirmative reply because I could think of no particular reason for writing a negative one: 'do what I would, I should inevitably be caught up before long again into some form of 'national activity': so why not this? 'Do you make your own life or do you allow circumstances to make it?' was a question found in a fortune-telling book in the spacious days of peace: I never found an answer to it. But perhaps the blessed word Italy did linger, a flickering flame of hope, in the recesses of my mind . . . the hillsides round San Gemignano, brave towers against the blue sky, the *contadino* down there through the grey haze of the olive-trees calling '*Vai!*' to the white oxen ploughing the slope . . .

Suddenly, a week or two later, I was facing a Colonel across an office table. He didn't look in the least like a Colonel to me; his whiskers and nose were long, his manner suave; he was not at all intimidating. Quizzing me in almost deferential fashion, he asked: 'Are you quite sure that you want to accept a post of - er - major - er - rather - a small post. I mean,' abruptly he exploded, 'people with your sort of record generally want a governorship at least!'

I was not, as I should have been, dumbfounded. I did not, as I should have done, pull myself together and say, with firm conviction, that although for the moment I could waive the right to governorship, my record deserved no less than the rank of a brigadier. That was what he undoubtedly expected me to do, and in the light that has now dawned upon me in regard to that particular period of history, I have little doubt that the requisite number of stars would have landed upon my most unmilitary shoulder. The authorities believed, quite inaccurately, that we were about to conquer and administer the whole of Italy: they had not got the men for the job: and the odd mess of my life, which included a fairly good knowledge of Italy and its language, as well as some years of Indian administration which, albeit ending in fury and disaster, had earned me the CIE as a consolation

prize, made my value high. The Colonel gave me every opportunity: but I, who had risen in the last war to the dizzy rank of major, then considered elevated, replied as meekly as any sheep that I was content with what he offered. Opportunity thus fell with a thud into the irreclaimable past.

Did I then, said the Colonel, now pursuing *his questions with*, naturally, a greater degree of contempt, mind working with Americans? I said that I didn't, on principle, mind working with men of any nationality; whether I should quarrel with individuals was another matter. The Colonel seemed satisfied with this, and asked me if I could sail at a week's notice. It was on the tip of my tongue to say (for I had been considerably humbled by the years of brutalization) 'You're not really going to *take* me?' – instead, I said, in the noncommittal manner which all really good Englishmen use, that I could, but would prefer not to.

On the way home it began to dawn on me that this thing might perhaps actually be happening. A major in Amgot – incredible, absurd; my friends would explode with laughter. To be regimented again after the years of fighting against regimentation in any form, against obedience, against discipline, against loyalty even, all the vices which our civilization extols as virtues, was unendurable. To be part of a machine without a head, trampling over Italy – how could I contemplate so odious a burden? Yet how could I contemplate the alternative – the drifting state of frustrated fury in the desolate garden? I wondered, as the autumn landscape slipped past the train, whether, after all these years, I could still speak a word of Italian. Better have lessons, I thought idly. Better 'put my affairs in order' – sail at a week's notice. Better, perhaps, order a uniform. Two, three, how many uniforms? But I did not believe in the future and I did nothing at all; except, of course feed the hens and chickens and bring in the goats. The afternoon sun cast its long shadows over what had once been the terrace, the lawns, the herbaceous borders; a tangle of weeds and trampled hay.

On that Friday came a letter with URGENT marked at the top in a nasty shade of green. It said that I had been selected for appointment as SO 11 CA Italy – whatever that might mean – that I should hold the post of acting Major, and that I should report immediately to the London District Assembly Centre, prepared to embark. A sinking sensation was evident in that part of me which had so decisively rejected war and everything concerned with war. Also in that part of me, forty-seven years old

and mulish, which was diffident, lazy and sybaritic. Humanity everywhere was vile, and why should life be better at San Gemignano?

Two days sank quickly under the ripples of time, and I was walking, feeling rather sick, into the London District Assembly Centre, which was in fact none other than the overwrought and melancholy building known in less secretive times as the Great Central Hotel, Marylebone.

I had not at any time frequented this somewhat gloomy tavern, and since receiving my sailing orders had visited it only once, although officers and men under sentence of departure were supposed to answer a roll-call there twice a day. I had done no more than hurriedly draw the camp equipment available: a process which involved one in the peculiar orgy of trying to 'fit' appallingly ill-fitting shorts and bush shirts in a maze of staggering officers engaged in the same practice. I had seen the equipment marked, packed, and despatched together with the two suitcases allowed: and observed the instructions, scrawled on a blackboard in the dimly lit hall, to the effect that my 'draft' (known as RZOFK which seemed to belong more to an oculist than an assembly of men) would parade for departure at such and such a time this evening. The consequence of my inattention to roll-calls was that I alone, out of some seventy officers, was improperly dressed. And the impropriety was hideously evident, not to be disguised. I was wearing service dress and a British warm, all very nice and new and snug: the rest (according, as I later learned, to Army Council Instructions, all laid down, my dear fellow) were buried in battle-dress and sank beneath the weight of tin hats and veils and gascases and haversacks and revolvers and convolutions of webbing holding up other impediments. The officers, as far as one could see anything of them beneath the bulgings of their armament, were not youthful: their movements were of a slow, creaking and clanking nature: the whole effect was, I thought, nightmarishly that of great slugs stirring below ironmongery. I was somewhat fretted by my impropriety but nevertheless glad of my saner clothes; and glad too, in an angry way, of a previous war's teaching that to ignore stupid orders is right and proper. The Army Council instruction which decreed that officers should take a long night journey in Great Britain dressed as inconveniently, though less attractively, than the White Knight, was just plain silly. The only possible justification for it would have been, and in point of fact probably

was, that men were going, as in the last war, *straight into the* firing line next day; whereas none of us could get to any possible firing line for weeks, unless it was submarine warfare, in which full equipment would have been a disadvantage.

There was no particular virtue (except to myself) in my want of ironmongery under the dim lights of the Central Hotel, but when I discovered the little round man – not without difficulty since he was almost extinguished by iron pans and webbing – who was our ‘Colonel in charge’, and displayed my condition, he uttered a fretful ‘tut-tut-tut’ and told me that I should go straight to the station (‘St Pancras, but don’t *tell* anyone’) to get my luggage out of the van and change into ironmongery on the platform. There were absolutely no lines in my hand to indicate that I should ever do such a thing, and I told him no. I said the War Office had rushed me away at a moment’s notice, and that they could have me in a British warm or not at all. The Colonel emitted an indignant clank and said (very reasonably I thought) that even if I thought myself a Field Marshal I should have to do as I was told. I adjusted one of his helmets which had got entangled between a mosquito-net and a gascape, and told him no again. He did nothing more. I suppose he could have had me arrested. I should have been delighted. I saw with hideous clarity, now that it was too late, that I had been a double-dyed fool to get myself into khaki again.

Depressed, having answered to my number, I climbed into the large open lorry. We sat in rows facing each other, on long wooden seats. The faces under the tin hats seemed to me revolting, and revoltingly similar. But then I have never loved my fellow-men. I saw these faces staring at me down endless days, in sleep, at the trough, on the road, in the hut and the tent, the barrack and the billet, the trench and the brothel, the street and the latrine, close breathy smelly faces from which one could not escape: and there was infinite dreariness in me. In a stream of lorries we rumbled down the Euston Road. Extraordinary sensation! Twenty minutes earlier I was in my flat in Park Lane: ten minutes earlier I was in a taxi, still master of my fate. Now I was an unrecognizable brown ant in a swarm, an ant becoming dirtier, less recognizable, with every passing minute. The passers-by in the Euston Road gave us heedless stares, turning away to their shops and buses: for us the threads of fate were now drawn tight. No turning back for us on this journey to nowhere, this space of time which for its space and time, possibly for ever,

would obscure us. It was possible, here and now, to hail a taxi and drive to Park Lane; and I could no longer do it.

Dark St Pancras absorbed our shambling figures, heavily clattering out of the end of each lorry: on a long platform we waited, cold and purposeless and silent. Diffident whispers ran among us, and now for the first time I heard the mutter of a 'dry ship'. The thought appalled me. I had visualized a perpetual stock of Dutch courage on any ship, and to shrink soberly from submarines seemed unthinkable. However, there was nothing to be done; it had not even occurred to me to bring a supply of alcohol.

A long unlighted train came sibilantly to rest beside us and we clambered in – a proceeding requiring acrobatics from all but me. Helmets and haversacks were hopelessly wedged in doorways, hooks and handles tore at webbing and capes. Inside the dark coaches there was just enough seating room – just. Racks and floors were quickly littered with coats and caps and rolled capes and tin hats with string shopping bags tied over them and revolvers and pouches and haversacks and the inevitable complicated webbing, a variation on red tape in khaki, encircling us all. Almost instantly, it seemed to me, some people began to snore – lucky folk so speedily oblivious to their surroundings. When the dim lights came on, they illumined a most convincing picture of grey-green battle disarray. It was 6.45 p.m. We were due, so it was understood, to arrive at our destination, wherever that might be, somewhere around nine o'clock next morning. Meanwhile we had each been provided with a packet containing a couple of gargantuan sandwiches of doubtful content, and a couple of buns guaranteed to wreck a denture.

Opposite me was a large lieutenant, still awake: my attempts at conversation fought a losing battle against his sleep. He was a policeman, but a City policeman: that distinction he was most careful to draw. He had been through the blitz and the city fire: I learned how this and that pal had been killed or rescued. Now he was going to do something of an Amgotically police nature, without, of course, knowing a word of French or Italian or German. He did not much care about going and did not know at all what his duties would be: but promotion, so he had been told, would be accelerated by his going, and so there he was. He had a family, he said, yawning. Boy of ten, girl of seven. Must provide. His head nodded. Seven-fifteen. How on earth, I asked myself, do people sleep so easily? I cannot sleep. Great people, it is said, always sleep easily: *ergo*, I cannot be great. The train bumbled

on to nowhere. I ate my sandwiches and wished that I had been born in a different age.

Sometime after midnight the train stopped at a long empty platform. It was said to belong to Northampton or Nottingham – no matter, a canteen served us with tea at a penny a cup and I blessed it. I had to borrow a mug because, in spite of a quite serious attempt to think seriously about military necessities, I had brought neither mug nor water-bottle nor, of course, anything to drink. Mugs and cutlery and water-bottles ought to have been hanging round me, according to the Army Council instruction: and they weren't. That this was reprehensible I fully realized: I was a burden not only to myself but also to the officer who had to stand by while I took his mug away, thereby probably depriving him of a second cup: yet even if I have to take part in another war when I am eighty, which seems highly probable, I feel sure that, at critical moments, I shall be without a mug, a water-bottle, and a drink.

The train trundled on: it crawled: it stopped altogether for long silent periods. Between one and four o'clock we might have covered, by my reckoning, some twenty miles. Did all troop trains thus wander vaguely through the English night? A flick of envy I had for comfortable civilians, travelling by express. Dirt in my finger-nails: and should I be able to use my electric razor on board the ship? In the Army, in the Army, slowly said the wheels.

I dozed: and we were running across moors into the dawn. Factories scarred them: more and more, bigger and bigger factories: at length in the distance derricks and the gleam of water. With groans and yawns and creaks and clanking, impedimenta were rearranged. Presently we shambled out and stood in dejected, untidy groups on a small deserted platform. Everyone looked surprisingly ancient, and I reflected, with early-morning gloom, that I must not only look, but actually be, the same. There seemed to be no one to give us any orders: we waited. I moved around evasively, feeling my lack of ironmongery conspicuous, and seeking a face to talk to or receive talk from: but found none. After a time a round little man whom nobody, I think, had ever seen before and who carried no badge nor even armlet to identify him, demanded our identity cards: and to him humbly we offered them up, not without (except for me) a great disarrangement of impedimenta. He did not ask our names or check our faces (such as they were) against our photographs: he merely collected and

removed, in an untidy bundle, the sole proofs of our identity. The train drew out, disclosing big dock sheds across the lines. Raggedly we trailed over.

Through high doors the grey sides of our ship stared at us: and we, shambling to a standstill, stared back. I disliked those grey sides immediately. Ships have a personality. The *Olympic*, my first ship, *en route* to Gallipoli in 1915, was a gallant handsome creature: she had majesty and force: you felt proud to be of her company. *Aquitania* by comparison, was a stout and fussy matron, common and rather unreliable: *Mauretania* a perfect bitch, though attractive in her way: *Normandie*, so much later, had undoubted charm as against overdressed *Queen Mary*. They were the great and glorious ones of my recollection. Among the less great were some charmers too—*Caledonia*, for instance, which took us away from the flaming beaches of Gallipoli to idle sunny Egypt, and *Kaiser-i-Hind*, sturdy but unattractive, which took me, and incidentally Colonel Lawrence, from Alexandria to Marseilles in the joyful October of 1918: and the graceful *Contes* of the Lloyd Triestino, running from Bombay to Venice, and arriving there always, or so it seemed, on the stroke of noon, when the pigeons flew up in their automatic cloud to the sound of the cannon: and last and worst of ships of my acquaintance, the gloomy grimy *Poona*, rolling me for the first time through the Indian Ocean. A hateful ship the *Poona*: and the grey sides of the ship I now stared at were definitely *Poona*. And on top of that, I thought, as we stumbled up the gangway, *dry*.

Squeezing in an impatient mass, though there was no hurry whatsoever, past the empty lift-cages up the uncarpeted stairs, we disposed ourselves and our impedimenta about the lounge. The lounge, as lounges go, went badly: its architecture was of the early Pullman period, decidedly the worse for wear; it had a high middle aisle surmounted by blackened glass and boxed by a derelict balcony stacked with rifles: and two low-ceilinged wings with windows permanently shuttered in deal. Faded cretonnes on battered sofas and bedraggled green curtains hanging sadly against the shutters bore witness to past glory. Having rushed up the stairs like sheep, in a hurry to get nowhere, or perhaps with an idea that first comers would get somewhere, we now sat staring, hoping very much with a hope that was destined to disappointment, for breakfast. A solitary nurse in the QAI uniform held her place on a sofa and enjoyed our sidelong glances: we, I

daresay, felt that the ship was somehow safer, and certainly more gay, if women were aboard.

Presently an old gentleman – his age was later confidently asserted to be seventy-one – with the fiercest possible face set in a halo of red tabs and gold braid, and a rainbow of medals on his left breast, bustled up to a table and, after fumbling with a mass of papers, addressed us in a series of short barks.

'Gentleman – this a full ship – very full ship – not a berth empty – not a berth! Do our best for all – but full ship! Take it as you find it! Wartime emergency! Short shipping!'

We dumbly registered loyal assent and disgust.

'Get down to business at once – Cabin A – cabin with a private bathroom! Eight colonels, please, for Cabin A!'

After some hesitation and muttering, eight elderly gentlemen pushed their way through the jungle of webbing and received billeting slips at the table.

'Eight more colonels, now, for Cabin B – cabin B – cabin with private bathroom!'

Yes, there were eight more. A lot of colonels, I thought. A cackle of colonels. A concentration of colonels. A regular constipation or even a conflagration of colonels. Eight colonels to a bath, eight colonels to a bed. A chorus, a confluence, a catastrophe of colonels. Eight colonels to 'Cabin C. I cannot stand it.

'Eight more colonels for Cabin D . . .'

No, there was something amiss. Muttering and hesitation.

'Isn't there another colonel heah?'

Nothing in the webbing jungle stirred. Bad show, chaps, bad show.

'Very well then – I want one major to go with seven colonels . . .'

Somebody let out a smothered gust of laughter. I looked round and caught a twinkling eye in a large face which was attached to the most untidy imaginable body. Somebody laughed, who laughed? I was filled with delight. Somebody else had visualized a major perishing under the weight of colonels sevenfold. I wasn't alone on the ship. So I shifted around and spoke for the first time to Teddy Croft-Murray, the most intelligent and endearing character who ever went to Italy under the banner of AMG. In a few moments I learned that he came – the Ancient Monument he called himself – from the British Museum and was destined to report damage to works of art in Sicily. God be praised, I said, for someone like this, and I forgot even to feel anxious when,

with seven unknown majors, I was handed a slip with C37-C written on it.

Down we went to C deck. Rather uncomfortably low, I reflected, for torpedo attacks: on the other hand well-protected from rocket-bombs and such: one can't have everything. I don't know quite what I expected in the way of cabin accommodation, but I think the reality startled us all. Eight bunks, wooden-bottomed (except for one), built in two tiers of three and one of two, round a cabin which might just have contained two moderately comfortable peace-time berths. The bunks were built of rough deal, and upon them a single naked bulb in the centre of the ceiling shone dimly: the space of floor left vacant could not have measured more than five by three. In this little vault, we eight were to sleep and breathe and have our dressing and undressing, as well as our baggage. And I, for my sins, was destined for one of the bottom bunks of three: there was a foot and a half of space between me and the bunk above me: a moderate St Bernard would hardly have squeezed into such a kennel. I must confess that I flinched a little at the prospect of long nights spent down there, pondering (soberly) on torpedoes, while not escaping the full effects of any sea-sickness which might occur above me.

The seven majors whom I did not know, plus me, plus impedimenta, being clearly too much for the cubic space of the cabin just then, I made my way back to the lounge. It was now as crowded as a third-class carriage on the way to Epsom on Derby day. Sides, backs, and centres of chairs and sofas were packed tight with military posteriors; officers sat on the piano, on the bridge tables, on the stairs leading to the balcony: they leaned against pillars or just stood, jostling against each other, waiting. And very soon the barking colonel addressed us again. He wished to say a few things about the voyage, h-r-r-umph, pure common-sense, ha-hum. First about accommodation, we should note, h-r-r-umph, that troopship transport was an operation of war, ha, and take the necessary discomforts in the right, hum, spirit. If the ship was hit, h-r-r-umph, the signal to muster would be a continuous, cmphm, continuous ringing of the ship's, ha, gongs: an intermittent ringing, cahum, of the gongs would mean, ha, an alert and we stayed, aha, where we were. And some of the officers, h-r-r-umph, would sleep below decks every night: he didn't approve, ha-hum, of men being always on the troop decks and officers above. We should be issued lifebelts: mustn't play with them, h-r-r-cmphm, our lives might depend on them. First

thing that happened, ha-hum, when a ship was hit was, aha-r-rah, that the lights went out; there were emergency lights on the stairways which could be unlocked with a key, silly idea, he never could, h'r-r-umph, understand it, very difficult to find keyholes in the dark, If the ship listed, aha, the nets would be put over: great thing was to see the men didn't panjc, and they wouldn't, h-r-r-umph, he'd seen 'em, good as gold.

After this enlivening discourse we migrated, *faute de mieux*, on to B deck, from which I now saw myself leaping into an appalling darkness of large black waves with a red torch that didn't work. I chased away this nightmare and endeavoured to take some stock of my fellow-travellers. They mostly looked, I thought, as uncomfortable as I felt. The most striking thing about them was their age. Few were under forty and the majority seemed well on the wrong side of it. Middle-age is not really a good time to go seeking torpedoes, eight in a cabin. Still, men and shipping were short, and there we were. No doubt, I said to myself unconvincingly, we are lucky to have bunks. We might have had hammocks or slept on the decks. What seemed less endurable was the fact, now established, that the ship really was dry. This was generally said to be due to the Americans, though how exactly the Americans came into it, I didn't gather; more likely due, I thought, to Nançy Astor. As I sat down with Croft-Murray to our lunch-with-water, I felt that this temperance was the last straw: for why, if I must eat in a herd and sleep in a kennel prior to drowning in the entanglement of a net or the isolation of a useless torch, must I be deprived of the one thing which would permit me to pass the voyage in a decent haze of tolerance?

Croft-Murray, who was above dependence on liquor and as delighted as any schoolboy with the whole business of leaving, laughed at me and produced, over lunch, a mouth-watering kind of book of photographs of Sicilian art. Though I have given some slices of my life to the study of art and painting, I am one of those unpersevering people who can never become expert in anything and I now learned all over again from Teddy about the beauties of the baroque and in particular the works of Serpotta, to which he was much addicted. We also lit upon the picture of an extremely romantic castle by the sea, belonging, I think, to Baron Bordonaro, and we meditated pleasantly upon the possibility of our ousting the Baron and living there in majesty, magnificence and might. Altogether I became somewhat infected

by Teddy's enthusiasm: but not without an uneasy mental glance at the mystery of my own future. To be an expert in Fine Arts, a saver of historic monuments, was straight plain non-belligerent sailing: but for what role should I be cast? I wished that I had given more attention to this detail before I left.

We stayed that night by the quayside. The cabin was hot and smelly, but none of the seven majors snored. Maybe I did: if so, they never told me. In that first scuffle to burrows there seemed little to distinguish one from another: they were all in their forties, one guessed: they were not beautiful: it appeared that none of them had been out of England before: and none spoke a word of Italian. Beyond cursing the cabin and life generally in a hearty way, they did not have much to say. So this was Amgot: these the embryo rulers of ancient Italy. It seemed odd to me.

In the morning we moved slowly upstream, passing the *Queen Mary*, in which, it was said with probable inaccuracy, nineteen thousand men were carried on every voyage by dint of eating and sleeping in a Box and Cox manner. There was a heartening display of warships and aircraft carriers around us, and we hoped – at least I certainly did – that they were all coming along with us. Such monsters seemed unsinkable. A more unpleasant possible prospect was that we should sail, as some ships did, alone.

Our ship, the *Aorangi*, had been built to accommodate 950 souls or bodies. That was roughly the boat accommodation. On this trip we were carrying 3,500 men and 400 officers, sixty-four of whom were destined for Amgot. Interested persons had counted up some sixty rafts in all, and calculated that about twenty persons could hold on to each raft, weather permitting. Thus it was clear that a lot of us would have, in case of emergency, to trust to lifebelts and torches exclusively. This indeed, became obvious at the first muster-parade, which wasn't strictly speaking a parade at all, since we were squeezed together in a tight mass on the space of deck allotted to our boat-station. Neither now nor subsequently during the voyage was there any question of boats or boat-drill or even a roll-call: you might as well have tried them on sardines in a tin. If the ship sank we had to get ourselves into the sea, and that was all there was to it. And since deckspace was so restricted, and cabins had to be cleared by 9 a.m., and our only lounge was used during the mornings and afternoons for film shows for the troops, we began to feel that the correct slogan for us was Not Wanted on Voyage.

The *Aorangi* now began to go round and round the *Queen*

Mary. She went round so often, and seemed so confused about her own purposes, that Rumour began. Rumour was potent and active among the Amgotees. Hardly any of us, I think, knew quite where we were going, what we were going to do, whether we were really wanted, what Amgot really was. Of course, many officers, not including me, had been to the school at Wimbledon to learn about military government, but few seemed very certain about their own role. A Perpetual Personal Uneasiness was evident. On this occasion Rumour had it that our compasses had gone wrong and that as a result we should miss the convoy. I supposed this to be rubbish; actually it was quite correct. Details gathered: a tug drew alongside and hailed the bridge – ‘Compass Engineer reporting’. Uneasily we tramped the crowded decks, stared at the grey slopes of Clydeside, ate our large but tasteless meals, drank our water, and shivered. Night fell: the ship remained anchored.

Teddy and I now discovered that we had made a fatal blunder by placing ourselves on the ‘second sitting’ for meals. We thought that we had been clever, since the second sitting was the grander of the two, reserved for the higher ranks, at civilized hours, and you didn’t – a really important point when dressing and shaving were acrobatic feats – have to get up so early for breakfast. But no, this didn’t work at all. The first sitting, when replete, rushed up and filled all the available seats, so that the second sitting found none. This was a grave matter after breakfast, when we had two hours of the lounge before the films started and we were hustled out on deck; less grave after lunch, when films started almost immediately, and you had perforce to walk or sleep: but catastrophic after dinner, when you were faced with an immensely long evening without a seat, and the only alternatives were pitch-dark rolling decks or the kennel in which, owing to the dim light, you could not read. As I think very poorly of walking on dark cold decks or lying idly in a kennel, my life rapidly became a game of musical chairs. Once you had got a chair in the lounge, you could not abandon it; and when nature forced you to do so for the purpose of eating or disposing of what you had eaten, the only course was to return and stalk a prey who gave any sign of leaving. I considered the possibility of abandoning dinner altogether, but compromised by eating it in five minutes on the altar of indigestion and rushing upstairs to the lounge before some of the more unwise of the first sitting, who had gone to fetch books from their cabins, could get there. Of course the

Aorangi, as troopships go, was a very good troopship, and nothing, after all, mattered except that our bodies should arrive more or less intact at their destination: but for middle-aged gentlemen like me she wasn't exactly a home from home. And what with one thing and another, our mostly middle-aged company was quickly swept by a plague of influenza; in the cabin eight throats wheezed, and eight noses trumpeted, all through the night.

*Ah, if I were King of England, or better, Pope of Rome,
I'd have no fighting men abroad, no weeping maids at home!
All the world should be at peace, and if Kings must show their
might,*

*Then let those that make the quarrels be the only ones to fight!
Ah, let those that make the quarrels be the only ones to fight!*

On Sunday morning, October the seventeenth, Rumour was busy as a bee. We had missed the convoy, said Rumour, and were putting back to Glasgow. And sure enough, towards midday, the *Aorangi* got under way and proceeded, not to Glasgow but up the Gairloch. And there, at a deserted quay among encircling silent hills, we tied up. All activity ceased and a blight seemed to fall upon the ship. Nobody told us anything. As a result all through that Sunday, Rumour grew. The War Office had always known that we should miss the convoy. Six ships had been torpedoed just outside the Clyde. The weather was too bad for any ship to get out. We were all going to be sent home again: Amgot had been dissolved. We should have to wait four weeks on board till the next convoy left. And so on. An atmosphere of uneasiness and irritation pervaded the ship. The brass hats no doubt knew but would not tell.

I took the opportunity to quiz my seven bed-fellows. Top bunk of my tier was red-headed, high coloured, loud-voiced Major Gray who swore fluently and often, shook the whole tier every time he climbed up, and required, mentally and physically, a lot of elbow-room. 'Tell you,' he bellowed, 'what the first thing I'm going to do if the ship's torpedoed is -' I looked a polite question. 'Come right down here and load my revolver!' I was puzzled and thought him perhaps madly Germanophobe. 'Why,' I said. 'To have a shot at the submarine?' 'No!' he shouted. 'To shoot the first man that panics!' I flinched at this, feeling that I undoubtedly should be the shotee: and registered a mental note to sequester his ammunition. But he was a nice fellow, all the same, and his sixth-form schoolboy attitude to life was admira-

bly effective, later on, in restoring order to shattered Italian towns. But he remained always angry and frustrated, and never got any promotion at all.

Major Green, immediately above me, wasn't really a major at all, and that was his trouble. He was a stoutish man, with bloodshot blue eyes which continually watered, and a long white face like that of a delapidated bloodhound. 'Can't *u*nderstand it,' he kept groaning. 'The War Office *promised* me, absolutely *promised* me, that I'd be a major, and here they go sending me as a *captain*. Can't *u*nderstand it!' We all came to know the details of his trouble—the interviews at the War Office where this and that had been said, the letters which must have mis-carried, the grave possibility of mix-ups with other Majors Green. He was a little tiresome.

Top bunk opposite was Major Brown, a very different character. Thin and frail, with a long long nose which looked as though it should drip and was crowned with pince-nez, Major Brown was less military than anyone I have ever seen. He wore his beret perched like a chef's cap on the top of his thinning locks, and his clothes seemed to hang in festoons from his narrow shoulders. The odd thing was that he had a fine three-year record as a colonel in the Home Guard, which shows that you never can tell. He was the gentlest of creatures, meticulous and methodical, getting up very early in the morning and moving like a mouse about the dark cabin, so that his dressing was completed before any of the rest of us had stirred.

Below him was the shining bald head, waxed mustache, and swelling stomach of Major Black. Major Black was a *faux Bon-homme* of the very first water. He was the soul of gusty good fellowship, clapping us all on the back, swearing loudly, and cracking dirty jokes. I put him down at first as an ex-sergeant-major and rather liked him: but soon his humour palled, and one saw that he was a hollow drum of a man, with nothing but a windy boastfulness beneath that glistening cranium. He it was who insisted on covering the cabin walls with pin-ups of the female nude: he it was who told us almost every night through the darkness about the 'little Italian widow' he was going to discover, and what he would do to her, and she to him.

Underneath him, in a kennel similar to mine, was ferret-eyed Major Rose. To him I took instantly and probably unreasonably the strongest possible exception. He was a fusspot, and a murderous one. His shifty little eyes probed like gimlets into everybody

else's business. He was, in his own interests, every man's enemy. He talked far too much, in a snarly little voice. In the morning he crawled rapidly from his burrow a few minutes after Major Brown, and proceeded, in spite of a torch flashed in the eye of anyone still attempting to sleep, to knock over and against anything that could be knocked. Crash it went, and 'tut!' said Major Rose in a subdued yet penetrating voice: the torch went out and he was heard fumbling and swishing about the floor: then crash again, and the torch in one's eye. This finally so exasperated me that one morning I extruded myself in the manner of a tortoise from my wooden shell, and with a shout of 'Leave my boots *alone!*' thrust him backwards into his burrow. He never forgave me, and for the rest of the voyage glared balefully at me whenever I entered the cabin.

Major White, top bunk on my right, and in possession of the only spring bed in the cabin, had a large round smooth face which had absolutely no characteristic except a large pair of tortoiseshell spectacles. He *was* the spectacles and the spectacles were him. Through them protuberant blue eyes peered upon the world with unjustified contempt: he was an accountant, and I'm sure a good painstaking one, and clearly he thought that all men without mastery of figures were fools. The only porthole in the cabin was just over his bunk, and he spent much time and trouble in adjusting it, after the light was out, so that the draught blew straight on to my face and not on to him. He also took possession, for his clothes, of what I firmly considered to be my hook: so that hooks being scarce, I had to put my clothes on the always dirty floor. I stood this meekly for some days and then, one evening, madly removed all his possessions to the floor and put mine on the hook: to my infinite surprise he did nothing at all about it.

And below him, last of the seven, lay Major Mauve, who had absolutely no character at all. He was fair and well-favoured: he hardly ever spoke: when he did, it was to utter a pleasant and meaningless banality. Once or twice I tried to draw him out but found nothing to draw. No doubt he must have had some vices or virtues but I never discovered them: and after the voyage I never heard of him again. He was a blank.

Major Gray – to return to my top-bunk schoolboy again – claimed to be a farmer and forester: and he certainly was interesting and genuine on both subjects. His King Charles' head was the flooding of the Sahara Desert by the sea and its conse-

quent fertilization as a result of the evaporation of the salt water which would return as rain: I never really attained to more than an academic interest in this to him absorbing topic. Major Green was an usher at a private school: and I could visualize him saying that he simply couldn't understand it when little boys were naughty, and smacking them with a succulent glint in those watery blue eyes. And if you want to know why he, a captain, was still among the seven majors, the answer is simple: he had simply put a crown on his shoulder, but, for some unearthly reason, could not resist telling everybody that he was not entitled to it. Major Brown of the long nose and pince-nez, was a Post-Office Traffic superintendent, a high position I gathered but exactly what he did I never fully grasped. He had a way of telling immensely long-winded stories which wandered further and further from the point, so that after a time one was agonizingly conscious that he had lost the thread and was madly trying to think why he had started: and one's own attention had by then wandered too far for one to be able to help. Some of these stories included flashes of post-office work during the blitz in, I think, Sheffield: and I got a picture of him, perhaps very wrong, sitting up through the small hours over a telephone and trying to locate a lost train of parcels upon which his honour depended. Major Black of the bald head said loudly and constantly that he was a farmer, which he patently wasn't and never could be: one guessed that he had possibly been a commercial traveller in cattle-food or fertilizers. Major Rose was going to Amgot, he informed us, as 'Public Utilities': what that was none of us quite knew, though I angrily put him down as an inspector of drains. He contrived to give the impression that he knew exactly what his job was, which was more than the rest of us did. Major White of the tortoiseshell glasses was, as I have said, a chartered accountant: and the blank Major Mauve was, rather surprisingly, an insurance agent. Perhaps he dealt with funeral insurance, which would explain his taciturnity.

Between me and these seven majors hung a subtle veil of mistrust. I was, although without wealth, a plutocrat: they, probably all richer than I, weren't. I had had forty-seven years of a life in which it was natural to command servants, waiters, taxi-drivers, shopkeepers, travel-agents and other modern serfs: they hadn't. I knew what to do with leisure, because I had been brought up amongst leisured people: they didn't. Above all, and perhaps owing to that now-contemptible thing, a public-school

education, I had learned to be fairly deft in small matters with life and people: and they certainly had not. With eight majors of my own circumstances and environment I should, though unutterably bored, have had the correct coinage of conversation and mutual acquaintance: with eight ordinary soldiers I should have been at ease: but with the class of affluent suburbia I was wholly and in both senses at sea, and no doubt, to protect my shyness, I was supercilious. I am sure that they were exasperated by me and everything about me, from my drawl to the electric razor which I slipped into the only electric light socket. But we were all terribly polite to each other for all the twenty-one nights which we spent together in that dim cell.

For that is what it turned out to be. Throughout that first Monday, Rumour was queen: on Tuesday we were paraded, in the usual scrum on deck, and cautiously informed that we had been delayed: we might be there a little time: we could not leave the ship: we could write letters but must say no word of our circumstances, and the letters would be sent only after our departure. This was stupid, and we all knew it: the first thought of most of us was to spare our families unnecessary anxiety: and since buses from Glasgow passed within fifty yards of us every fifteen minutes it was hardly probable that the presence of a 20,000 ton liner in the Gairloch was unknown.

On Wednesday, paraded again, we were informed that we might go for walks but only in parties of fifty under a senior officer: and we must on no account speak to the natives. So, since anything was preferable to permanent confinement on that ship, we set out in pouring rain, crocodiled like a girl's school, and trudged four miles of dreary road, casting envious eyes on red pillar-boxes. To me it was quite outrageous: we could all perfectly well have gone home for ten days, and there was no earthly reason why we should not have written letters to say that we were still detained at a British port. I am only grateful for a much clearer understanding of the feelings of our political prisoners in India: but they had at least a cause and reason for confinement: we did not.

But it must be recorded, and it was no small thing, that during our ten days of English purdah we *drank*. Alcohol in large quantities was conveyed aboard, perhaps to stupefy any grudges that we might have felt. Gin cost 4d a glass, a double brandy 1s. Such prices were in any case irresistible, and we had nothing else to spend money on. With nothing to do on a crowded ship, can it

be wondered if some, or even most, indulged with scant measure of wisdom? Officers staggered about the decks: the bursting lounge was rent by banged piano and the concerted yell of obscene song, against which bleary but determined bridge players roared their bids at one another, and addicts of houseie-houseie deafeningly proclaimed their hieroglyphic auctions. Day and night the row went on and on and on: Major Gray was sick in his bunk: Major Brown tishooed and tishooed after over-indulgence to drive out influenza: Major Black's dirty stories got dirtier, louder, and more incoherent: Major Green was maudlin and persistent about his captaincy. At last I understood, and dazzlingly, how infinitely preferable a dry ship might be.

On the morning of Sunday, October 24, we moved majestically into the Clyde. There *was* something majestic about it, because our move coincided with morning service, and the land began to slip away from us to the strains of *Onward Christian Soldiers* sung by thousands of male voices and accompanied by the band of the Irish Guards, which – so rumour inadvisedly had it – Alexander had summoned to Italy for the entry into Rome. Being personally unmoved by religious rites, I sat in the mercifully deserted lounge, and enjoyed a discussion between my emotional associations, which were entangled in the sentimentality of hymn-tunes, and my reason, which stated flatly that it was absurd for people who were off to murder and plunder for the sake of greed to sing about the cross of Jesus.

And now we began to sort ourselves out a bit. A voice in my ear had muttered 'At my age, to sleep in a kennel . . .' and I recognized the voice as friendly. It belonged to Fred Boddington, intelligent and charming and a skilful draughtsman who amused himself by drawing facile and flattering portraits of us all, which we, of course, accepted with alacrity and satisfied vanity. Teddy Croft-Murray remained my chief prop and table companion, and through his intelligent eyes I began to know more of Sicily than I had ever known before. And Sandy, who startled me one evening by remarking, without introduction 'The interior decoration of this salon is not entirely to my taste' made up our quartet for no particular reason, since he was like a large young puppy living entirely for the moment and caring for nothing beyond it. Anyhow, these three friendly faces made life decidedly better.

And then one night we sailed. For some time we had been imagining the throbbing of engines: now at last they really throb-

bed. The decks began to heave and slide. We were told that we must not undress but lie in our bunks fully clothed. That night we did not know whether we sailed alone or in company. But morning brought revelation of an impressive kind. Around us in exact formation over the dark white-crested sea rode twenty-two great ships, grey ships and black ships and even white ships, ships with one funnel and two funnels and three funnels, with squat funnels and high funnels, ships with high noses and short noses, ships with long lines and stuggy lines, but all ships that somehow looked gallant and purposeful and brave. And beyond them, ahead and astern, to port and to starboard, ran the escorting destroyers like black pencils trailing a feather of foam. It all seemed very silent under the grey sky, very silent and proud and intent. I don't know why there should be anything remarkable about twenty-three ships at sea together, but on that first morning there certainly was. Our forced deck-walking soon made us familiar with the convoy, and we came to note quickly when it was changing direction or when one ship or another changed its place in the staggered ranks.

The sea became rough. The men were sick everywhere and always: the officers scarcely at all. Some of my cabin-mates took to their bunks, but no untoward incident occurred. The lounge and decks were less crowded which was a relief and, apart from a slight nervousness lest I might at any moment have to breast large dark waves in a lifebelt, I hoped that the rough weather would continue. Among other chores it fell to my lot to distribute the famous red torches: I had to show each customer how his torch worked and that it *did* work: and the customers were most particular. Again and again they nervously returned. 'I say, it *did* work all right but it doesn't seem to now,' or 'This thing works *sometimes* but not *always*,' or even 'This one seems to me very *dim*.' There were so many that I got very good at this. 'Tut!' I said to elderly colonels, 'You've been playing with this, you must leave it alone,' and handed them another dud which somebody else had brought back. Truly the torches seemed very temperamental: still, when you considered how many must be issued . . . Naturally, I kept the best and brightest for myself, as well as a stock of particularly maddening duds for generals: but no generals appeared. We hung our torches gingerly on our lifebelts, to which they were attached by a long cord, and with this hunch-back equipment securely tied on, paced the wet decks. It was

extremely cold. Rumour had it that we were somewhere near New York.

And then quite suddenly the sun shone and the seas were blue. We had sailed into another world, a world I hadn't seen for much too long. We came out on to the top decks like flies into the summer and sat about in the boats in the sunshine. Intoxicated by the Mediterranean atmosphere, Teddy and I composed the Amgot anthem, which, to the tune of *Yip-i-addy-i-ay*, went as follows:

Old Samuel Diehard
Loot-Colonel, Retired,
Strolled down Piccadilly one day:
At his club our old Sam got
A message from Amgot,
Which gave him once more active pay;
He said 'Well, by jingo
Must I talk the lingo?'
They said, 'No, your language will do.'
So with rank of full colonel
And vigour eternal,
He sailed on the ocean so blue . . .

Ancient Military Gentlemen!
Off to govern the world!
They have put off domestic cares,
But in their bath-chairs they'll have civil affairs,
Cheltenham, Camberley, Cromwell Road,
Receive their exiguous rents,
Though they're old and they're
To the colours they're called,
Ancient Military Gents!

We thought that this might be an excellent addition to the boringly repetitive ditties howled every night by groups of officers round the piano: but it didn't go at all. Fred Beddington added a neat verse about Wimbledon, but the rest seemed to think it not funny. So we had to be content with humming it to ourselves as we sat in the boats in the sunshine: and one morning when so engaged we watched a submarine attack on the convoy. It was a mild affair. The destroyers wheeled in and out among us, dropping depth-charges, and we, of course, said, 'There she is!' 'No, there, look!' and never saw anything. The convoy sailed on.

It was impossible even to feel nervous among all those ships on that calm blue sea. But we noted later, from the secret telegrams, that our convoy had been attacked at that point: and felt pleased. Indeed, the sinking of just one ship, say, might have been an improvement. In the matter of sinking ships I am the greatest coward un-cour-martialled: but a story is a story.

Gradually we drew in to Gibraltar. Land, a faint blur in the morning, narrowed in the afternoon to rocky coasts, south and north: and in one of the most glorious sunsets I have ever seen we passed the Rock. Our convoy had arranged itself into a crocodile: two by two it stretched away over the curving sea, and each pair of proud ships caught the crimson reflection of the sinking sun. And the Rock stood there, sheer, aloof, unconquered. The English have not the faintest right in the Mediterranean, which belongs to much more charming people; still, it was a grand sight.

On the next night at about ten o'clock we had an alert. Very few people had ever obeyed the order to sleep in their clothes: I certainly never, because the kennel in itself was quite enough to try me. On this occasion, when the gongs sounded their most alarming note, I was, I shudder to confess, in the lavatory in my pyjamas and without a lifebelt and a torch. Could anything have been worse? I jumped to the immediate conclusion that we should sink in a minute, saw myself trapped in the lavatory, struggling . . . Through officers fully equipped and streaming up the gangways I rushed panting to the deserted cabin, dressed with shaking hands, discovered my torch, put my lifebelt on backwards, and got to the deck only to hear Teddy mutter in my ear 'It's only a practice - I meant to tell you . . .' I said hotly, 'Well, you are a disgusting pig!' and realized that I ought to have been shot by Major Gray.

When the extremely long parade - for it amused the Commandant to walk, heralded by bugles, all over the ship - was over, we discovered the flagship was signalling. Somebody kindly translated the signals, which amounted to the instructions that such-and-such ships would turn in towards Algiers next morning. We were, so to speak, home: and I breathed a sigh of relief as I crawled for the last time into my kennel. I need not have been so optimistic.

On the same morning General Kenyon Joyce was to arrive at Brindisi as Deputy-President of the Allied Control Commission, the establishment of which was to be announced on November

10th, and in which I was destined to play a long, thankless and irritating part. Had I known anything of this, I might have played what cards I held in a very different way: but I knew nothing, I was only a military number, and my future only a military whim. Although the *Aorangi* didn't tie up until a little after ten that morning, one of the habitually idiotic ship's orders had got us all up for breakfast at 6.30: and after that there was nothing to do save sit, if you could get a seat, in the lounge, and play bridge. Through sheets of steady rain Algiers did not appear inviting: and looking down upon the ocean of mud which lay over the docks, I profoundly hoped that a messenger from General Sir Humphrey Gale, Chief Administrative Officer of Algiers, to whom I had constrained a High Authority to write regarding my person, would arrive with a cordial welcome and warm invitation. In that hope, it is scarcely necessary to add, I was disappointed. It is extraordinary, looking back on myself, to note how thoroughly deluded I was into thinking that I had some importance.

Sandy, who had been here before in wartime, seemed to know all about it.

'You'll be stuck at the racecourse if you don't watch out,' he said encouragingly. 'Terrible place. Worst camp in the world, I should think. Nothing'll get *me* there. I'm off to do something about it.'

Amgot was now struggling into its impediments, its greatcoats, its green and brown gascapcs. Teddy, as usual, was grinning. 'Bordonaro!' he admonished me, flourishing his stick. 'We are *en route* for Bordonaro!' I said crossly that I was on the direct route to pneumonia. The lorries, it seemed, had arrived. There was just no getting out of the lorries, and the camp.

We scrambled in. It was the Euston Road over again, but colder, wetter, and much more crowded. We bumped and jolted in a sodden mass along cobbled streets, past the dock-sheds, past dilapidated warehouses and dismal barracks, past wrecked ships with the seas breaking over them; stopping every now and then with a jerk which sent us tumbling over one another; always in a sea of traffic, jeeps and trucks and lorries outvying each other in blaring horn and thundering exhaust. After about half-an-hour we came to a halt. A dripping white wall, holed with guichets, proclaimed, in fading letters '*Pelouses*'. We got down.

A red road of shining sticky mud led down to the racecourse, which was little less than a river. On the further bank long lines

of brown tents crouched abjectly. We filed across. Somebody, goodness knows who, said 'Thirteen of you in tent 7: twelve in tent 6...' Here was tent 20, tent 19... splosh, splosh, splosh. Tent 7, you could clearly see, had once had a trench round it: now the trench was a trace: the pegs for the side-flaps had vanished and there were no floor-boards. So wind and rain blew merrily through and nothing was likely to stop them. The mud inside the tent seemed deeper and stickier, if anything, than the mud outside. Light? No light. Batmen? No batmen. Our luggage? No luggage. It was chilly, and would soon be growing dark. I suddenly found Major Green drooping beside me.

'Terrible!' he groaned. 'Can't *understand* it.'

'I can, though,' I said. 'In the last war an officer had a batman, and a field officer even had a certain degree of comfort. I was idiotic enough to imagine that these things still held good. But no lack of manpower can kill the old-established game of scrounging; and I am going back to Algiers.'

'But *how*?' wailed Major Green.

'That,' I said, 'we must find out.'

So we made our way to the road again, and held out signalling arms. Instantly an obliging jeep stopped and took us on board. We bowled gaily over the six miles. A telephone call to General Gale was now clearly indicated, and, to my great surprise, General Gale answered.

'Come up and have dinner with me,' he said at once.

Dinner I thought, is all very well; what I want is a bed.

'I'm stuck,' I replied, 'stuck in two senses at your racecourse camp, which is quite horrid.'

'So's war,' said General Gale.

'There isn't any war here that I know of,' I said, nettled, 'and I don't want to spend the whole night trying to find my way back to the racecourse.'

'Send you my car. Speak to my secretary. And shut up about the camp.'

'Anyway,' I said to Major Green, as I put down the telephone, 'even if we've got to sleep in mud, we have a General's car for the evening.'

We found Fred Beddington in the hall. He was a colonel.

'Tried to fix you up with the spare bed in my room,' he said, 'but the Town Major wouldn't hear of it.'

'Majors are dirt,' I agreed. 'So are Town Majors.'

The car arrived. It was very luxurious and swift. Muddy and

dripping, we sank back upon its deep upholstery and tried to think of somewhere to go. But we didn't have anywhere to go. The best thing seemed to be to hunt for our luggage. We drove to the docks: no, the luggage had gone. Well then, the racecourse. We flashed over the shining cobbles, driving against glaring headlights which, after the years of blacked-out England, seemed incredibly dazzling. The rain beat down in silver rods, a tropical flood of rain. I had no compunction about the general's car and chauffeur: they took me right up to the entrance of tent 7.

Tent 7 was deserted: it was pitch-black: there was no light: but by striking matches we discerned our baggage, higgledy-piggledy in the mud. The tent-flaps blew hither and thither in the darkness: the rain beat in. Not really camping weather.

'Put up our beds, I suppose?' said Major Green's wet voice.

I said: 'I'm going to dine first,' and felt a beast. But hearts must be hardened when you're scrounging, and I left Major Green in the wet and windy night. The general's car spun silkily over the gleaming roads and up the winding Rue Michelet; and very soon indeed I was following a white-coated batman across a white marble hall occupied only by a white grand piano. A door opened and I found myself in an elegant library, warmly lit, wherein sat a smart young gentleman whom I correctly diagnosed as ADC, and a portly Brigadier covered with ribbons. There was also a convincing array of bottles and glasses and decanters on a walnut table. I had a sherry and made conversation. The atmosphere was somehow fraught with generals: it smelt of red tape: it exuded convention. Not my sort of place at all, I thought. But it must do for a night. I had been careful to bring toothbrush and razor.

General Gale blew in, living w ' up to his name. He was very hearty and very large. His coat seemed larger than any coat I had ever seen. His voice reverberated. He knew he was a general. His personality enveloped us all, not necessarily because he had any personality but because he was General Gale at that moment, CAO Algiers. I wondered what kind of a being really inhabited that large body and what it thought about. The General, I had been told, was a keen patron of the arts, and much addicted to music. Very soon, in fact, he asked whether I played the piano, and seemed disappointed when I said no. (Should I try and play for my bed, I wondered?)

'We had Noel Coward here the other night,' he remarked. 'Magnificent.'

The last word I should apply to Noel, I thought.

'Fine fellow!' said the General. 'Done a magnificent tour, all over the damned place, you've no idea – right out into the camps, giving a one-man show. You know him?'

I said that I did, slightly.

'Fine fellow!' said the General. The conversation languished. Hell, I thought, at this rate I'll never get a bed.

'So you don't care about the racecourse?' asked the General.

'I just thought it an abominable disgrace to the Allied authorities,' I said.

'Damn it all,' said the General, 'I'll have to put you under arrest if you talk like that. Damn it, it's *my* camp!'

'Then it's a disgrace to you. Perhaps you don't know about it.'

'How you chaps grumble,' said the General, helping himself to another glass of whisky. 'You're all soft, that's what it is.'

'Soft be damned,' I said. 'If you bring out old wrecks like me to a country which you're supposed to have gallantly taken and can't give them even a dry spot to sleep in, there must be something wrong with your administration. After about a year, too.'

'But, my dear chap,' said the General, leaning back on the silk cushions and waxing confidential, 'don't you realize that that camp is out of use? People like you generally get sent straight to Tizi-ousu or somewhere. It just happened that your boat arrived late.'

'Surely,' I persisted, 'that makes it all the worse. We could have stayed on board, or you could have put us in one of those many trains standing in the station, or, after all, you could have found us a villa like this. But not the racecourse.'

'Hell,' said the General. 'Hey, Robinson, we'd better give the Major a bed. But mark you,' he added to me, 'not for more than one night. I've got a whole posse of generals coming tomorrow.'

The room had meanwhile been filling up with generals. More than half were American, and since I was then blissfully unaware that a star connotes generalship in American, they might have been lieutenants as far as I was concerned. Still, their silver hairs undoubtedly indicated exalted rank. I, the one unexalted but also the one guest, sat at dinner on the General's right, and asked him if he knew the whereabouts of Oliver Baldwin, who had, I knew, a villa in Algiers and whom I had hoped to find there.

'Haven't the foggiest notion,' said the General. 'Took his villa away from him. Had the impudence to complain, the brat. We've had quite enough of Prime Minister's sons here.'

'I should have complained, and loudly,' I said. 'Why should you take it away from him?'

'Why not?' said the General. 'I've no use for him.'

'He's a great friend of mine,' I said.

Definitely, I thought, I am not getting on at all well: and I told myself sharply that I was a soldier, and an insignificant major at that, who must get on well with generals by never crossing them. But then again, myself told me, you are a person of middle age with no stake at all in generals, and all these gentlemen who behave in the manner of schoolboys and are covered with ribbons and stars, are quite possibly, judged in the context of beauty, truth, intelligence, or their passage from the cradle to the grave, insignificant people. Such thoughts, I told myself, get you into trouble, and I began to drink a great deal of the excellent red wine which was served so deftly by white-coated and even white-gloved waiters. Presently I had an enormous headache, and sat on a sofa conversing with this general and that, while the radio blared. And presently I got myself to bed, and, remembering the racecourse, I did bless General Gale for that.

In the morning, at breakfast, nobody spoke. The white-coated white-gloved waiters served us with eggs and bacon and coffee and rolls, and nobody spoke. Everyone had a paper, and nobody spoke. General Gale did not appear. My cue clearly was to vanish, and still without speaking or being spoken to, I got myself out of the house. I had not the vaguest idea of where I was, but after a little walking I came to a high point where there was a balustrade and some steps, and an excellent view of Algiers. The sun was shining in a clear blue sky, and Algiers, a place I have never much liked, looked moderately picturesque from this eminence. I could almost imagine myself a tourist, free. So I sat upon the balustrade and considered my position. I did not care much for it.

Suddenly I saw Teddy on the steps below me, brandishing his stick.

'Bad man!' he panted, coming up. 'Bad man! Where have you been?'

'Sleeping with generals.'

'I guessed as much. Wise man! It was hell down there. Those policemen! Cursing and shouting and trampling over everybody. Haven't the remotest idea how to behave decently. Would you believe it, one of them said to me 'I've spent most of me life managing toughs in Golders Green, and I guess Italy'll be about the same. And those are the people we send to Italy! I hate them!'

Teddy banged his stick on the balustrade. 'And you're not at *all* popular with them, I may tell you,' he added.

'Probably I'll survive it,' I said. 'But I didn't know they knew me.'

'Oh yes! Oh yes! They all cursed you for running off like that and leaving your baggage all over the place.' However, I put it in a corner.'

'Thank you,' I said, feeling ashamed. 'What happens to us next, do you suppose?'

'I shall now take you to see the English Church here which used to be a mosque. Very fine. Then we must visit the Kasba. After that we go to Tizi-ousu, I believe. Berners has gone to Palermo.'

'How did he manage that?' I asked. 'And what on earth is Tizi-ousu?'

'Awful, I think,' said Teddy. 'Some sort of school. Nobody knows how long we stay there. I'm going to get out of it if I can. I say, shall we go to GHQ and try to do something? What about your generals?'

'I'm no good at all with generals,' said I, firmly. 'Of course, I might try Maxwell. But it's all rather depressing. I don't know what on earth I'm here for.'

'Why don't you come into Fine Arts? You'd love it, and you'd be just the person for it,' said Teddy, with his usual enthusiasm.

'Unfortunately I don't know the first thing about it. It is being rapidly borne upon me that I don't know the first thing about anything. Fine Arts at one end, drains at the other. And law and education, I suppose, in between. I'm merely a dilettante.'

Teddy quoted some lines from Beddington's verse of the Amgot anthem:

At Wimbledon College
They stuffed him with knowledge
Of Amgot's essential hygiene:
He took sanitation
And crops in rotation
With law and fine arts in between –

'Hey, I mustn't sing in church, I suppose,' he added, breaking off, for we had arrived at the so-called English Church, whose delicate lines and graceful domes seemed oddly a variance with the rows of rush-bottomed chairs and hassocks. 'It is fascinating to see how Saracenic culture –'

'Teddy,' I said, 'why are you a soldier at all?'

'Because I hate the Germans.' Teddy tapped his stick angrily against a column. 'I hate them and I hate them and I hate them. I suppose I oughtn't to say that in church. But I've always hated them.'

'I don't believe it. You don't hate anybody. You'd be giving all Germans cigarettes and chocolates the moment you got into Germany.'

'I shouldn't! I shouldn't! One may respect their art, but -'

'Not even the descendants of your beloved Mozart?'

'We've got to win the war, I suppose,' said Teddy, moodily. He began to hum a phrase from *The Magic Flute*. The mosque had a pleasant echo. How many preachers of various religions had exhorted their congregations in this building to assist them in slaughtering the heretic? Perhaps one should look upon it all as a huge joke: look after oneself and be careful to be on the right side. But then, one couldn't pick one's side: that was decided by the accident of birth. Oneself, then.

'I suppose,' I said, 'we'd better try our luck with GHQ.'

GHQ, as far as Amgot was concerned, proved to be at the top of a great many rickety stairs, and rather a mean place when you got there. But it was full of dignity and bureaucracy. I could not see Colonel Maxwell without an appointment and he was exceedingly busy. We could and did see a very vague Captain Mitchell in a very small office, and he assured us that we should be going to Tizi-ousu the very next day. Italy? Oh, well, perhaps later, when we had been 'assigned'. Transport was very tight. We must have patience. At this point we ran into Sir Leonard Woolley, who was passing through on a rapid visit to Italy, accompanied by a lady secretary dressed as a captain. I had known Sir Leonard slightly for some time, but his views and mine on India had collided violently at the beginning of the war, and I could hope for no help from him. He was, on the other hand, very much up Teddy's street, and said at once that he would help him to get quickly to Italy. The depression which this occasioned in me was only slightly alleviated by the fact that Sir Leonard did not seem to be able to get to Italy himself.

'Deplorable lack of organisation!' he complained. 'Here I am with all the necessary papers, and the Home authorities wanting me back, and day after day I come to this office and there's no transport!'

This was my first introduction to Priority, a most important

by-product of war. Priority I was reserved for VIP – Very Important People – and got you anywhere. Priority II was for generals and such, and ensured you a moderately quick passage, provided that transport was available. Priority III was for lesser, but still urgently needed, fry: we might have got it if somebody had urgently needed us, but they seldom did. All other Priorities were scarcely worth having. It must be added that Priorities could be gotten and lost in various peculiar ways. On this occasion Captain Mitchell, after noting that we knew Sir Leonard, whispered to us: ‘Who *is* that bird, really?’

Teddy replied quite indignantly that he was a most famous archaeologist and Head of the War Office Department for Fine Arts.

‘Well, well,’ said Captain Mitchell. ‘We know nothing about him here, you know. Perhaps he should have Priority II? I had only given III, which means that he’ll never get there.’

We said (noting that Priority III couldn’t do for us) that he most certainly ought to have at least II. Captain Mitchell sighed, and with a duster removed the name Woolley from one part of the blackboard which hung above his desk, and chalked it up in another. Teddy and I looked at one another, great minds thinking alike. If, when Mitchell was out of the room, we were to chalk up Croft-Murray and Fielden in the right place . . .

Having nothing more or better to do, we now registered our names with the clerk in charge of mail. In this world of lost identities, that seemed important, and we left the office with the pleasant but wholly mistaken idea that our mail would reach us without undue delay. The day was passing and I began to feel anxious about the camp, the policemen, and the mud. Something had to be done. I steered Teddy down the rue Michelet to the British Officer’s Club, a gloomy affair which resembled an enormously over-crowded station buffet. Here, by waiting in a long queue, one could get something to eat. But as I was checking in my cap and overcoat at the cloakroom, a familiar voice said in loud tones: ‘So they’ve got you at last!’

I looked round and saw Oliver leaning against the wall, regarding me with amusement.

‘I imagined that you’d be turning up. No escape, you know, however much you wriggle!’

‘Oliver!’ I exclaimed. ‘The answer to my maiden’s prayer! A roof, a bed, in mercy’s name!’

‘Of course,’ said Oliver. ‘179 rue Michelet, at your service.’

Thus I evaded mud. Oliver's flat was grubby, down-at-heel, and in execrable taste. It had, ~~ra~~ in Algiers, a showerbath which actually worked, though spasmodically, shooting a jet of scalding water into the eye while projecting an icy deluge on to the navel. I could sleep on a much-battered divan in the corner of Oliver's bedroom. For these mercies I was not only at the time grateful but shortly afterwards homesick. They were an oasis of comfort and cleanliness in a desert of diminishing delight. And the diminution of delight started on the next evening, when we were ordered to parade at the racecourse for transit to Tizi-ousu.

There was no evading this. Obviously I ought to have been quicker and wiser with Maxwell or the generals, but I had failed. Under the probing eyes of the policemen in uniform, a tough lot, I had to drag my luggage across the racecourse, earnestly wishing that I had refrained from taking with me all the two hundred pounds permitted. Two hundred pounds, when wet with rain and slippery with mud, is a heavyish load for a middle-aged gent. There was also, I felt and feel, a certain loss of dignity in dragging luggage about. I am all against the dignity of labour, except in other people. In some disorder and a bad temper, I managed to land my belongings in the colonels' lorry which had just arrived from Algiers, and seemed less crowded than ours. Also it had no policemen.

We started. Nobody, not even the colonels, had the remotest idea of the distance to Tizi-ousu or of our fate when we got there. We sat on the floor of the lorry, which after a little seemed hard. It began to rain, and it was also extremely cold. An hour passed, and another, and then a third and a fourth. The land around us grew more and more desolate. There were hills in the distance with violet shadows, very picturesque, but small signs of human habitation. At last we trundled into a straggling village and, turning into a deserted lane, came to a standstill. It was very quiet. We got stiffly out, stretching cramped legs. Two or three officers appeared round a corner, and perceiving some of our company, uttered cries of welcome. Old Wimbledonians, I gathered. I wished that somebody would welcome me, or rather I wished passionately that I were somewhere else. If the *Aorangi* were bad, this, my very bones told me, was going to be infinitely worse.

Led by the welcomers, we started to walk up an extremely steep road. At the top appeared gaunt, naked buildings which had the appearance of unfinished schoolhouses. That is what they

were. Our guides, pointing to them, said politely: 'That's London.'
I did not understand, but I wished that it were.

There are certain moments in my life when I am overcome by a panic so intense as to make me feel that I must instantly explode, expire, or be translated to a quiet room where regular meals are served to me by a silent and beautiful nurse who also places a hot water bottle at my feet. Such moments do not occur in wars, blitzes, or other similar catastrophes in which my cowardice is merely cringing, but more at children's and grown-ups' parties, formal meetings, bazaars, funerals, weddings and family gatherings. They are moments when human sanity, whatever that may be, seems about to leave me, and I feel riding within me a foaming chattering ape, tearing hair from heads and spectacles from noses, burrowing under sofas and cracking craniums with anything handy. Does anybody else ever feel like this? I shall never know. But one of these moments came to me very soon after I stepped over the threshold of 'London'.

Tizi-ousu was a Military Government School. That is to say, is taught, or was supposed to teach, people how to militarily govern. The school had been located in this village eighty miles from Algiers because, presumably, the empty half-finished buildings were handy and the officers' would be far from mischief, their hands, be it added, being quite frantically idle. Convenience or secrecy or the whim of some extra-imaginative commandant had decreed that the scattered buildings should each be dowered with the name of a city. 'Come down and dine at Washington,' or 'I must just run over and get my pen from Manchester,' seemed at first a little queer, but one got used to it as one gets used to all things. It was a great deal more difficult to get accustomed to the fact that these far from commodious buildings were filled to more than overflowing with four hundred elderly officers, of whom three hundred and fifty, at the time of our arrival, were American.

My moment of panic had, however, nothing whatever to do with Americanism. I was far from noticing the nationality of the denizens of London. My consciousness registered only the fact that I had stepped into the exact atmosphere of my private school, a place which I had loathed so extravagantly that all my notions of hell, when I have them, are connected with it. Here in London were the same aggressively bare walls and tables, the same sense of chill discomfort, the same jostling un-

thinking herd of humanity with its same unwashed smell, the same feeling, above all, of being part of a condemned and imprisoned pack. We were placed on benches at long wooden tables on which gobbets of food lingered, and before us were set earthenware bowls looking none too clean and containing something which, had I known it, was American C rations, doubtless sustaining to the stomach but revolting, as far as I was concerned, to eye and palate alike. No sooner were we seated than the bench which supported three fat majors opposite me collapsed, and with three heavy smacks they landed on the stone floor. Everyone laughed uproariously. The majors took it in very good part. It was all exactly as it would have been at my private school. And at this moment I felt rising within me the urge to escape, to go mad, to run and run and run upon the desolate hills, to do anything, in short, but this. I felt with an absolute rising of the hair on my scalp that I was for ever a prisoner, a prisoner without identity, just another one of these old and bloated colonels and majors stretching away and away down the long bare tables, cackling and rumbling into an eternal void . . .

But human sanity being a chain which, for fear of imprisonment by our fellow-men, binds us all more or less, I did, of course, nothing. I registered myself for a billet and meekly put up my camp bed in the freezing little cell which I shared with two other majors, Major Blank and Major Zero. Major Zero had been at Tizi-ousu for three months and had, it seemed, acquired a measure of indifference to it with the help of enormous quantities of poisonously bad cognac which he somehow managed to import from Algiers. He was completely bald, had no teeth and a certain amount of charm. When asleep he made a regular little chirruping noise followed by a long sighing puff, and for these noises I could gladly have killed him. Major Blank had spent, so far, only a fortnight at the school, and was still fighting it: he spoke of his 'assignment' quite hopefully, whereas Major Zero had clearly long ago given up all hope of being assigned anywhere. Major Blank was ruddy and hearty: he snored in a wet gurgling way and almost invariably gave vent to a frightful yell at about 2 a.m.: I once drew his attention to this and he said immediately, in an indifferent sort of way, that he had always done it. Between these two majors I put up, as I have said, my camp bed and at once began to indulge in some painful regrets. The first regret was that I had not in all London

been able to obtain a mattress, and camp-beds without mattresses are decidedly chilly: the second was that I had not enough blankets: the third was that I could no longer carry the sleeping draught without which, for the past ten years, I had been eternally wakeful. I slept but ill: and it need scarcely be recorded that my nights were remarkable for one steadfast resolution – to escape, as soon as might be, from Tizi-ousu.

In the morning it was breakfast at 7.30, parade at 8. On notice-boards in the big bare hall we read our names, dismally enrolled in platoons: for a few fortunates there were instructions to proceed to Algiers. It was raining hard, so we assembled muffled in gas-capes on a kind of barrack square which faced the gaunt walls of London. A less military-looking lot can hardly ever have been seen. We were all, it seemed, middle-aged or more than middle-aged; and the years had given to most of us a definite stamp of corpulence or lankiness. A few British veterans there were who still bore the impress of the last war: but among the Americans there was scarcely any attempt at smartness. They were business men dressed up for the occasion and didn't attempt to disguise it. The wonder was, one couldn't help thinking, that they arrived on parade at all.

When we had been shuffled into some kind of order, a Voice descended unto us from above. It was the voice of the British Colonel in charge of training, who stood on a balcony after the fashion of Mussolini, and, with the aid of a loudspeaker, told us our duties for the day. The Colonel had a refined-Oxford voice which was faintly funny even to Englishmen, and must have been fantastic, as well as almost incomprehensible, to the Americans. He patted the air as he spoke, and obviously very much enjoyed his performance. He said:

'Eh'm gled to welcome some newcomers to our midst and Eh feel sure that they will benefit bey this course. Eh'm sorry the weatheh is so bed, but that I cehn't help. Neow this morning there will be the usual Italian classes, and Eh must esk newcomers to faind the appropriate class for themselves. Et ten o'clock all newcomers will parade at Bristol. Et ten thirty there will be a lectchah on the Legal Administration of Administered Territory and et eleven thirty we shell haye the pleshah of hearing Colonel Rowell, lately returned from Sécily. Gentlemen, thank you.'

We now went indoors, if it could be called indoors. I cannot remember any doors and there were certainly no windows. A bitter wind blew through the classroom, so that we could not take

off our dripping gas-capes. The Italian classes began at once, and were all, it appeared, conducted in the same manner, that is, in the manner of a chorus. Officers sat in rows at the desks, and the instructor, an Italo-American soldier, said '*Buon giorno!*' whereat the class repeated, with one very American voice '*Bwahn jah-naw*'. We newcomers were meanwhile 'tested' in Italian by a corporal. He exchanged a few words with me, seemed extremely startled by my knowledge, and passed on. Presently I found myself a member of a 'top' class of three, one of whom was a colonel who spoke Italian so much better than I did that I was immediately reduced to silence, while the other, also a colonel, had apparently no reason for joining us since he appeared to understand nothing. The net result of this ill-assorted trio was that Colonel Coke conducted a fluent political discussion with the Italo-American corporal, while Colonel Coal interjected a few idiotic remarks and I remained silent. In any case I was not, in my dripping gas-cape, soaked boots and extreme state of cold, in any mood for conversation.

At ten o'clock we were in a large lecture hall with a stage. We sat about on the benches, for all the world like droopy wet birds on telegraph lines. The colonel who had addressed us from the balcony now spoke from the stage. We must remember, he said, that this was an Allied show. We had to do our best to work in with American officers. Their ways were not always ours nor our ways theirs. And so on. He added a point of illustration. All American officers saluted each other irrespective of rank. That was not in the British tradition. But we must forget the British tradition and do the same. This annoyed me and I wanted to ask why on earth the Americans should not forget American tradition which was after all much younger, but I was too cold and broody to put the question. The result of this fantastic instruction was that while we were at Tizi-ousu we wore out our right arms and the peaks of our caps in frenzied saluting: once we got to Italy, it became the rarest thing on earth for any officer or even soldier to make any pretence of saluting at all. By December 1944, any soldier saluting me in Rome would so startle me as to make me drop at once anything I happened to be carrying.

Through the rain we slugged up the hill to London again, saluting right and left, and sat us down once more at the grubby wooden tables to scrape our earthenware bowls. Afterwards we crowded hopefully round the notice-boards. There would be

revolver practice and then a 'hike' in the afternoon. Mysterious entities known as 'Region V' and 'Region VII' were being formed. The following officers would be seen tomorrow by the Assignment Board . . . not me. My spirits sank still lower. I looked at the rain and decided that nothing on earth would persuade me to shoot a revolver or walk. On the other hand it was too cold to sit still, there were no books to be had by any means, and although I supposed I could roll myself up on my camp bed and listen to the conversation of Majors Blank and Zero, the prospect had no appeal.

Teddy – whose Woolley had not saved him from Tizi-ousu, and who, as an expert on Fine Arts, was ludicrously out of place there – had become intoxicated as well as irritated by the American accent. Neither he nor I had ever been to the States, and our sudden precipitation into an overwhelming mass of American voices and mannerisms was startling. 'Did you understand a *word* of that?' he would ask me eagerly, after some officer had been explaining the beauties of Ithaca, or Cleveland, Ohio. 'Not a word? Nor did I. Shall we ever?' And he began to talk loudly in an accent which he thought American, shouting 'Marnin' Majior!' in the street, so that I, who felt that this might be rude, tried to shush him. But of course the addressees must merely have thought that he spoke better English than most mumbling incomprehensible Englishmen. Teddy, however, was also irritated and alarmed. 'Too *many* of them! It's a swarm! It's Bedlam!' he would groan, thumping his stick on the ground. 'No, no, no, it gets me down!'

In the evening before our last scrape of earthenware we were allowed a glass of wine. It was filthy stuff, the first of many litres of horrible near-grape that I was destined to pour down my gullet, and we drank it, standing in the rain-and-wind-swept corridor, out of the halves of bottles roughly broken, on which, if you were not careful, you could prettily gash your lip. While musing over the mixture in my bottle-bottom, I was accosted by a very nice American major, who introduced himself as Randolph Leigh and said that he had been wanting to meet me. He had some regard for a little book I had written which ought, he thought, to be published in the States. I almost embraced him. It was unbelievable that anyone should pick me out of the ruck, should actually know my name. My tail absolutely wagged. Major Leigh asked, without further ado, whether, if he could get my book published in America, I would give him fifty per cent.

My tail wagged a bit slower, but I said yes, why not, because after all that book seemed a faint and far away thing now. Leigh then told me that he was waiting for assignment as Public Relations Officer.

This was interesting. I had done Public Relations work in the Ministries of Food and Aircraft Production, and if it came to an Assignment Board, I could claim a sort of *expertise* in that field, to which my years of radio also more or less fitted. I had detested Public Relations work always. The Public Relations Officer is everybody's fool. He is supposed to filter Authority's news to the press, thus collecting dirt from above and execration at the vile filtered mixture from below. If a good story 'breaks', Authority will skip the Public Relations Officer altogether and reap the credit: if a wily correspondent gets away with confidential news, the Public Relations Officer is to blame: if there is no news, the Public Relations Officer is an oaf for not inventing it. 'PR' has in war, perhaps owing to America, grown to huge proportions: its only real use, as far as I could ever see, is to feed, billet and transport correspondents. On the other hand, the Public Relations Officer sees a good deal of the game: and I would, in any case, have seized upon anything that offered the shadow of an excuse to escape from Tizi-ousu. So I learned from Major Leigh all that I could about the Public Relations of Amgot. It appeared that there weren't any. So far, so good.

After two days, along with many others, I got dysentery. I know how to deal with this old enemy from Gallipoli days, but it did not make life more comfortable. The wind seemed colder, the food more revolting, the barren hills more drear. I discovered that very few officers ever went to lectures and indeed there were very few lectures. Mostly people sat about in greatcoats in the classrooms, reading Italian grammars, or sat on their camp beds and drank synthetic cognac, if anyone had it. Regions V and VII were discovered to be Umbria and Tuscany, parts of Italy as yet unconquered. Our armies appeared to be so firmly stuck just north of Naples that the prospects of further conquests were remote. It was even said that Amgot officers were being sent back from Sicily. There was talk of forming Regions IX and X but even if they were formed – that is to say, when a group of officers had been set to study their geography and economics – there would still be far too many officers without a job, it seemed, in Tizi-ousu. Something, in fact, had to be done, if one wasn't going to be caught in Tizi-ousu for ever.

But the days dragged on. I grew dirtier and dirtier, in fact extremely dirty. The water that dribbled out of the common taps was almost too cold to wash even the hands, let alone the body. I was encrusted with dirt. In spite of our visit to the clerk at GHQ, no mail arrived for us: and this was to enrage us for weeks to come. For want of something better to do, I wrote some long letters, and for want of something better to say, I remarked in one of them that what chiefly struck me about Americans was their musty superfluity, and that it was high time that the Volsces, or somebody, were in arms. I forgot to 'frank' this letter, which was, perhaps, unfortunate. It was opened by an American censor. But of that, at the time, I knew nothing.

Summoned at long last to the Assignment Board, I waited in some trepidation in the corridor of Washington. I told myself that my fate was about to be decided and I must pull myself together. Fred Beddington was also waiting: he had had dysentery rather badly and looked bedraggled. 'This place,' he remarked, 'is no longer even funny.' When he came out he told me that he had been assigned as Chief Executive Officer of Region IX. That was Emilia. I said that Bologna was a charming place. He said with a sigh that he hardly expected to see it. He was right. I went in. The Assignment Board was nothing more than the mild Colonel Mildeman and another sealyham type of colonel, very small and stupid. At their request I reeled off my Who's Who list, which always sounds impressive when reeled.

'I feel sure that you should be of great value,' said Mildeman.

'Ah-hum, yes, indeed,' muttered the sealyham, shuffling his papers.

Neither of them, of course, meant it. All authorities know by instinct, whatever I or anybody else may tell them, that I am a Dangerous Person, somebody who Won't Do What He's Told, somebody who laughs at the wrong things, probably doesn't believe in God, above all Lacks Respect. They always know and I always know that they know. I told myself now that I must be very careful indeed. Both Sealyham and Mildeman were clearly puzzled. Law, Education, Local Government, Police, Finance, Transport, Education -

'What about Education?' asked Sealyham, who clearly thought that I was a highbrow.

I said that I knew nothing at all about education.

Not Education, then. Public Health, Sanitation, Public Works, Agriculture, Food -

'What about Food? You were in the Ministry of Food, I see.' I said I had never understood anything about food.

'H'm, Displaced persons, Refugees, Information – what about Information?'

'What sort of information?' I asked.

'Well, – tut – information, I suppose,' said Sealyham. 'But I don't think the Information Section has been formed.'

'You couldn't,' I said hopefully, 'assign me to something that hasn't been formed?'

'Well – tut – no; I suppose not, no. Rather a difficult case. Let's see now – Prisoners of War, Army, Navy, War materials, Disposal, Industry, Commerce, Fine Arts – what about Fine Arts, now?'

I wondered, could I do it? It would be fascinating. No, I felt sure that I didn't know enough. No, I said, I knew nothing about Fine Arts.

'Nothing about Fine Arts?' said Sealyham, looking over his spectacles. 'But what about the BBC and all that, hey? What about the BBC?'

I said firmly that the BBC had nothing whatever to do with Fine Arts.

'Ho!' said Sealyham, 'the BBC . . . nothing to do . . . Quite a wag, aren't you?'

It seemed that the interview was getting out of hand.

'I think you should put me down for Public Relations,' I suggested.

'Public Relations?' said Sealyham, as if this was quite a new idea. 'Public Relations? I don't think we have any. Have we?' he added, turning in a puzzled way to Colonel Mildeman.

'I – er – really don't know,' said Mildeman. 'Perhaps there should be.'

'Obviously, there'll have to be' I said.

'I don't think *obviously*,' said Sealyham, nettled. 'That is for the authorities to decide.'

'Of course,' I agreed, cursing my tongue. And with an effort I added: 'I should think for *you* to decide, sir.'

'Hum – well, in a sense, perhaps, yes,' said Sealyham. That had done the trick. I watched him writing slowly 'Recommended for Public Relations' against my name. That has got me, I thought, so far: but damnation take me if I ever do Public Relations work again. Just let me get out of this and into Italy . . . What should I do in Italy? That question seemed to grow more and more

difficult. I had visualized myself as doing possibly radio work, which with Italians might have been good fun, or merely acting as an interpreter. What I *wanted* to do in Italy had always been a vague and indefinable thing in my mind. I wanted to be there because I felt that the Allies would trample over Italy, and I wished, if I could, to prevent a little of the trampling. But I had never thought of Italy in terms of these jobs, these Laws and Public Works and Sanitation, and I couldn't see myself in such capacities. But why worry? The thing was to get out of Tizi-ousu.

On the next day we were told at breakfast that there were some trucks going to Algiers, and officers could go if they liked, and return that evening. In a hurry and a scrum officers dashed from their earthenware bowls. Not being a hurrier or a scrummer, I arrived almost too late to be able to force my way in to any truck, but on the tail of a truck for eighty miles I sat. Only the compact coating of dust which I received prevented me, I am persuaded, from falling to pieces. But so glad was I to be out, even for a day, of Tizi-ousu, that I should not have minded if my feet had dropped off.

There was only one first, obvious, and essential thing to do in Algiers, and that was to have a bath. Oliver had told me that he was leaving for England and in any case the truck did not go near his flat. So I hurried with the others to the American Red Cross. This was actually the only place in Algiers where officers (below the rank of colonel) could get a bath at all. And each of us had to be introduced by an American. The American officers were kindness itself: they not only introduced us but pressed food and drink and soap and towels upon us: but I felt that the British authorities might have done better. It was the beginning, in me, of that sense of material inferiority which has made, and will make, so many strained relations between Americans and British. The British are so accustomed to dominating things and people that they cannot swallow the idea of being a poor relation: whereas the Americans, who can seldom dominate, resent the British assumption that the British, in fact, still do, and occasionally and naturally remind them that they do so with American permission.

The American Red Cross was – even apart from the dazzling contrast with Tizi-ousu – an exceptionally attractive place. It had a vast reading-room, the walls of which had been covered by the most slick and amusing frescoes of New York that you could wish to see. Perhaps they were more than slick and

amusing: they had real beauty, and gave the place a gallant air. There was a prettily furnished snack-bar and a handsome dining-room: flowers everywhere, and plenty of books and magazines. You might have expected a luscious bath: oddly enough, the only baths consisted of one large room in which twenty showers set close together in the ceiling played upon twenty naked figures set close together on the floor. The effect was rather Michael-Angelesque and amusing, and I revelled in my shower: in any case the 1914 war had destroyed any sense of modesty that I may ever have had. But I observed that the British officers were a little shocked by this, whereas to the Americans it was perfectly natural: and generalising from the particular, I wondered whether Americans wouldn't take very easily to communism.

As soon as I had bathed I flitted up the hill to GHQ. I was determined to see Colonel Maxwell, arbiter of our destinies, and I sent through Colonel Maxwell's office door a persistent thought which told Colonel Maxwell that he would not get out of that office without seeing me. And Colonel Maxwell saw me. He was very polite and very courteous and very distant. 'I am sure,' he said, 'that you can be very useful to us.' I wanted to say 'But have you never *heard* of me? Did nobody in England say they were sending me or why they were sending me?' But I knew that it was useless to say anything, for I knew that Colonel Maxwell was not really arbiter of anybody's destinies. He was another red-tabbed bureaucrat. And I came back thinking to myself, in a fury, that do what I might, I should be immured at Tizi-ousu for the rest of the war. I flung myself into Captain Mitchell's little office and said: 'It's the limit!'

'What's the limit?'

'The way you keep people hanging about!'

'Would you like to write a letter?' said Captain Mitchell, 'There's an air courier going tomorrow.'

'I would,' I said. 'But there's something I'd like better.'

'What's that?'

'To get out of Tizi-ousu.'

'You don't like it?'

'I don't like it.'

'Where would you rather be?'

'Italy, here, anywhere! In a dustbin, for that matter.'

'Here?'

'Better than there.'

'Then come here.'

'How?'

'I'll write an order.'

'You mean to say,' I said 'that *you* can write an order to release me from that prison?'

'Why certainly,' said Captain Mitchell.

'Now?'

'Now, if you like.'

'Write it,' I said. 'Can you give me a car?'

'Might be done,' said Captain Mitchell.

I got the order and I got the car. I called at Oliver's flat to see if he was still there and found that he was. The driver of my car, a lumpy open American machine known as a Command car, was a bulky singing swearing Yankee who must have driven trucks very fast in peace-time: he covered those eighty miles in two hours and a quarter. I seized my luggage, told Teddy what he must do, deposited my order in the office, and was back on the road again in a quarter of an hour. I pinched myself to see if I was well and truly awake. 'Good-bye, Tizi-ousu!' my rising spirits chanted. A French lorry, refusing for some time to let us pass, followed us doggedly, its headlights blindingly reflected on our windscreen. My driver only fled the faster, screaming round precipitous curves and diving into wells of darkness. It did not matter: nothing mattered. Tizi-ousu was safely behind me, and in Algiers, I felt, all things were possible.

We were flying high across the Mediterranean on a cloudless day. Tunis, a smudge of brown mist on the tilting horizon, lay behind us: ahead and as yet unseen was Sicily. Far below, the silver sea was speckled by a large convoy. Our plane was not the latest word in luxury: running along the sides were tin benches, appropriately dented for posteriors. They were slippery and hard, and most peculiar twists of the neck were necessary if any view was to be obtained from the little portholes behind us. A stink of petrol drifted through the cabin, already blue with the smoke of thirty cigarettes. Thirty men's baggage lay in a heap towards the tail. Everybody was very gay.

Teddy and I were gay, too, but apprehension clung to us. Mentally we poured incessant libations to the gods—the old gods of Sicily, perhaps, whose pilgrimage we were, not without stress and ardour, making. But we still felt nervous about the gods of Africa, those redtape gods who had bound us and held

us, and who might yet, who knew, recall us. It was only twenty days since we had stepped ashore from the *Aorangi*, and yet those twenty days seemed a purgatory which might have had no end. From our tin bucket seats we looked down on the lovely sea and prayed.

Algiers had proved, in fact, nearly as bad as Tizi-ousu. True, there were no early parades, no earthenware bowls, no revolver-practice and hiking: but it was a city of nothing-to-do, a station-waiting-room city, where our morning and afternoon trudges up the long hill resulted in nothing except Captain Mitchell's sigh of 'Nothing today, I'm afraid.' And, stupid as it may seem, it had seemed more than easy to get lost and forgotten for ever in Algiers. Nobody cared whether we stayed or went, that was the truth of it; we knew now that the Allied Commission had been formed in Brindisi to supervise the execution of the Armistice terms: we knew that Amgot was busy in Sicily and Calabria: but nobody, it appeared, wanted us. Teddy, I knew, must be wanted eventually: an expert from the British Museum couldn't be indefinitely ignored: but almost anything, I felt, might happen to me. And because of this, perhaps, Teddy was bolder with Captain Mitchell than I was. We came to know, with desolating familiarity, the exact meaning of the various spaces on the Captain's blackboard; and Teddy, jabbing his stick ferociously towards it, would exclaim, 'Now just be a good fellow and put us *there* this morning,' to which Captain Mitchell would wearily reply that it was no good putting us *there* with Priority III. Teddy thumped his stick and said 'Well, give us Priority II, man!' But Captain Mitchell shook his head; and down the hill, disgusted, we went again.

We roamed the Kasba, tested the mostly horrid little restaurants, ate meals in dingy Transit Messes, and preyed on the goodwill of the American Red Cross: this last matter worried me eventually into writing a letter to a High Personage, suggesting that England still possessed sufficient money, goodwill, ability and pretty women to be able to give British officers some semblance of equality with their American peers. Teddy later advanced, rather vilely, the theory that the main result of this letter was the seizure, to his mortification and disgust, of the Royal Palace of Naples as a canteen for British troops.

It was Teddy, eventually, who had the Bright and Cunning Idea. I had bought, rather expensively – but how, over and over again, was that expense justified! – an enormous Arab rug of

white and blue, the kind of thing that you could roll yourself in, and the kind of thing that my chilly limbs had yearned for at Tizi-ousu. And as we passed down the street with this bundle, we came to the shiny doors of MATS – the Mediterranean Air Transport Service. And Teddy, tapping his stick on the window, said, ‘now perhaps we ought to do something here?’ And I replied ‘Well, we might try.’ And in we went. And thus the main force of our daily attack shifted from Captain Mitchell to MATS. And MATS, perhaps because it was chiefly American, was more amenable than Mitchell. We had only to get a travel order, they said, and then . . .

Mitchell was unexpectedly stubborn about the travel order. Why should we want a travel order, when we weren’t in the right place on the blackboard? We could only mutter that it would be nice to have a travel order, one day we should want a travel order, why not a travel order now? Mitchell objected that he had no orders to give us a travel order: didn’t, in fact, really know anything about us. Why on earth, anyway, were we in such a hurry to get to Palermo? We said we really didn’t quite know, it seemed to us that we ought to be there, what were we doing here? Mitchell didn’t know that either, so we said that we knew that we were being a great nuisance to him, with which he heartily agreed. Then, we suggested, with a travel order we *might* give him no further trouble. But how could that be, he said: nobody could leave without his permission. Oh, we knew *that*, we said hurriedly: but if we found methods about which we could tell him, wouldn’t that be a good thing? Think of this office without us, said Teddy, rapping his stick on Captain Mitchell’s papers. Captain Mitchell thought: eventually he made out two travel orders. Priority III.

‘Priority III?’ said MATS. ‘Well, well, we’ll do our best.’ And after a few disappointing mornings, MATS had a paper for us – by A/T to Sicily. We said nothing to Captain Mitchell. We crawled one morning with our luggage into a truck and sped to the aerodrome of Maison Blanche. The aerodrome was almost knee-deep in mud, crowds of officers with mountains of luggage seemed to be everywhere, but the chatter of planes was music in our ears. We presented our papers at the booking-office.

‘Priority III?’ said the clerk, raising pained eyebrows. ‘Not a charnst, I’m afraid, sir, not a charnst. Very full today.’

We had a few glib lies ready, such as ‘General Weevil has sent for me immediately,’ but this was a British clerk, the Lord be

praised. So I said to him 'Do British officers always get left behind?' And he said 'Well, I'll see what I can do, sir.' He went away and we sat and sat and sat. To pass the time away, we had ourselves and our baggage weighed. I, being a lightweight, came off creditably, but Teddy, who was positively bulging with books and other accessories, was about twice the permitted standard. 'Most *essential* papers,' he exclaimed loudly, tapping a bursting suitcase. 'Straight from London, and instantly required in Sicily,' he confided, indicating a collection of prints which he had purchased in Algiers. I fully expected him to say that his stick was essential to Italy: which indeed, now that I come to think of it, it probably was. The weight-adjusting sergeant accepted it all very mildly. And presently our clerk came back to tell us: 'I think I've got you on to the two o'clock plane.'

We waited. A ritual that was to become familiar again. The loudspeakers issued the lists. Plane Number EJKRE leaving for Palermo at fourteen hours – Colonel Bonk – Here! – Colonel Tonk – Here! – Major Maggs – Here . . . The list ended. We were not called. 'Sorry, sir,' said the clerk. 'Told you we were full up today.' Teddy groaned, 'I suppose we shall have to go back to Algiers.' I replied 'Not me,' thinking that this time Oliver really had gone back to England. To the clerk I said 'Well, we shall have to sit here till we get a plane.' 'Can't do that, sir,' said he, 'this office closes at five.' I said 'You'll find us here tomorrow morning, or the next, if necessary: you see, we have to get to Palermo.' Teddy sat obediently and very large: I endeavoured to look as aggressive as possible. The clerk looked at us as at a pair of clowns, and presently went away. 'It's no good,' said Teddy. 'Nevertheless,' I replied, 'I shall continue to sit here until a plane takes me away. Back to Algiers I am not going, not, not, not.' I had but little faith in my own determination, and visualized our eventual ignominious expulsion. Two hours slipped by and I had just given up all hope when the clerk returned and, bending over the counter, said: 'There's a special plane going to Tunis. Would that do?'

We said it would. We were not very happy about it, because Rumour had warned us to avoid Tunis at all costs: there, Rumour said, you could easily get stuck longer than at any other known place. But Tunis was not Algiers and in Tunis the long hand of Captain Mitchell might stretch in vain. In Tunis at least there would be a different office, different Transit Messes, a different American Red Cross. And from Tunis it would be more difficult

to send us back. Thus reasoning we climbed with joy upon the plane, and fled along the coast. It was growing dusk, and as we looked down on the sea we told ourselves that it was here and here – so we had learned from the telegrams – that our convoy had been attacked after we had left it, by torpedo-carrying planes, which had sunk three ships and blown up one of the destroyers: yes, the lovely white ship which had been our constant neighbour had gone down, and the little ship with the high prow, and the grey two-funnelled liner. It all seemed very unlikely on that calm evening.

It was dark in Tunis when we landed. The aerodrome had a deserted and faintly repellent air. All the airsheds were knocked about and burned out, of course, and the usual skeletons of dead aeroplanes lay around. We were told that we should stay at the Kock Hotel and the Kock Hotel, when we got to it in the darkness, was a strange gaunt tenement of a building, black and scarred, with very few and faint lights. Inside there were bare passages crowded to suffocation by Americans. Nothing but Americans. Except for ourselves, there wasn't a British soldier. We were given a ticket and sent into a huge black dormitory, where, under a single dim bulb, were fifty plank beds. Here and there American officers were sitting or lying about. It was immensely depressing: I had a slight feeling of panic. We went downstairs. It was 6 p.m. – not an hour at which it seems suitable to me to eat dinner, but it does so seem to the multitude of Americans. Therefore we waited in a queue, and after a while had C rations out of earthenware bowls.

'No!' I said to Teddy. 'I don't care for it. I don't believe it's necessary. And I can't stand all these Americans.'

'I *told* you!' replied Teddy. 'I told you they were a menace! Too *many* of them!'

'Let's get out,' I suggested.

'But where?'

'I don't believe,' I hazarded, 'that this is all of Tunis. In fact I know it isn't. I've been here before.'

Teddy, always willing to oblige, followed me into the darkness. He protested a little, but not much, when I heaved him into a passing lorry, which presently picked up a score of Spanish workmen. They talked volubly and I wondered where on earth we were going, for I certainly had not the faintest idea. However, something that looked like the street of a city did after a time show up, and when I asked the Spaniards for the Majestic Hotel

they responded immediately, telling us where to get off and adding details of direction which I didn't understand. Without difficulty however, we found our goal.

Here were bright lights and a marble staircase and even an orchestra playing in the restaurant. No difficulty about getting two rooms which appeared to be clean and civilized. Teddy decided at once that we must start dinner all over again. I flinched at this, two dinners in an evening, even if one is C rations, being more than I can take. But Teddy was adamant: very soon he was on intimate terms with the orchestra, discussing what they could and could not play: and before long they were obliging him with a one-man concert. We went to bed feeling replete and gay, and I then discovered that one counterpane was all that the bed possessed: our baggage, of course, was still at the airport. My night was chilly: and when at last I fell into an uneasy sleep it was only to be awakened, it seemed instantly, by the strangest and slowest, surely, of human feet moving down the passage. Softly my door was opened, and an immense negro with a guttering candle stood before me: he opened his mouth but no sound came: instead, he advanced five fingers and then one, and moving forward advanced them again near my face five fingers and then one —

'*Oui, oui,*' I almost shouted. '*Oui, j'ai bien compris, six heures!*'

Five fingers again, and then one. Slowly, silently, the negro withdrew. I got up, shuddering, and washed my face in icy water. Perhaps I had been altogether foolish to come to Tunis. We must not miss the plane. The bus, the only bus, so they said, was due to leave at seven. Teddy and I waited for it on the sidewalk, but when it arrived it was full and more than full. Officers clung to its bonnet and balanced on its footboards: officers bellied out behind it like the tails of a wind-blown waterproof. 'No room for more!' they shouted. 'We must get on!' we yelled. And scrambling, scraping, pushing, wrestling our way through a jungle of legs, we got on.

'Priority III?' they said at the airport. 'Not a hope, not a hope in hell! Have to wait for a fortnight at least.' But we were little daunted. We felt a new certainty that the thing could be done. We asked who was in charge. Sergeant Rafferty was in charge, it seemed, at that moment. Where was Sergeant Rafferty? In that office? We went in and said 'Sergeant Rafferty, isn't it?' and Sergeant Rafferty was pleased (just as we all are) that somebody knew his name. We said to Sergeant Rafferty that Captain Mit-

chell of GHQ, whom he was sure to know (and he didn't deny it) had instructed us to see him at Tunis so that we should reach Palermo for a meeting that very day. A most important meeting, we said. It was extraordinary, said Sergeant Rafferty, that we hadn't got higher than Priority III. We agreed warmly that it *was* extraordinary, but the whole thing had been done at such short notice, and Captain Mitchell had been so sure that Sergeant Rafferty would see us through . . .

And now, really, the mountains of Sicily could be discerned, painting their violet lines against the blue.

'Or do you think it's Algiers?' I asked Teddy.

'Get thee behind me, O father of horrors,' said Teddy, with his face twisted round to the porthole. 'The land of Bordonaro lies before us - though we'd better not *count* on it, perhaps, quite yet.'

No counting on it, I agreed: no counting on anything until it was firmly snatched. That, perhaps, was the outstanding difference between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Victorian era and the Bright Young Things of Edward or George or Elizabeth. Would it be true to say that our forefathers looked forward with placid certainty to long orderly lives spent in toil or leisure in one baronial hall or in one cottage, while we of the twentieth century had known nothing save a world that cracked and crumbled with change? Hardly, because the great poverty-stricken majorities of the world could never have felt secure. Nevertheless, the elusive prize of 'security' was an eternally popular aim, perhaps particularly of the British, who so much admired Mr Baldwin's pipe and his slogan of 'safety first'. Should human beings feel secure? Clearly it was contrary to Christianity, which aimed at the sufficiency of the day and the consideration of the lilies of the field. Clearly it was contrary to nature, whose creatures are never secure. Clearly it was destructive, since a secure aristocracy had everywhere deteriorated in three or four generations. Clearly too, it was death to art and science, since the artists and scientists, the poets, painters, musicians and writers, seldom emerge from the ranks of the secure. Yet this war, like all wars, was being fought for security, which from a propagandist point of view meant saving ourselves from Hitler, but basically was the same eternal struggle for the lion's share of land, food, power; the struggle which could not end because nature's uneven distribution of talents to men made the even distribution of world resources impossible. Or was that a fallacy?

It was a fallacy only if human beings adopted the doctrines taught by all the great religious teachers of the world: the doctrines of abnegation. Yet, paradoxically, the doctrine of abnegation was most faithfully pursued by the soldiers and sailors and airmen who gave their comfort, limbs and lives to the unworthy aim of power. The deduction was, perhaps, that human nature possesses an essential nobility which is constantly misdirected. If we desire to stop wars, our problem is to discover an objective which unites men in a common endeavour and produces courage and self-sacrifice to the same extent as does war. We have never found such an objective yet. And until we do, all peace conferences must fail.

Such thoughts are dangerously pacifistic, and in fact I was a pacifist escaping from pacifism in khaki. Maybe most of us were. The struggle to stick to pacifist beliefs, which in time of war seem formless, passive, even cowardly, as well as extremely unpopular, is a much harder struggle than the donning of khaki and the acceptance of orders. Once one is a part of the machine it is easy to concentrate on the cogs and forget the purpose. There is even a warm sense of self-righteousness in being on the side of the big battalions. But the real heroes of mankind are never with the big battalions. The Christs, the Buddhas, the Rousseaus, the Tolstoys, the Kants and the Gauguins, the Jeremiahs and the Dantes, are never with the mass. Their lives are isolated struggles, intense, unswerving, unhappy, unhonoured, against the conventional beliefs, the accepted formulas, the Pharisaical complacencies of mankind.

'You've gone,' shouted Teddy in my ear, 'off into a dream. Trapani! *Trapani*, don't you see?' he exclaimed, jabbing his finger at the porthole. And there, below us, swam through the blue sea a crescent of sunwashed white houses, lavender hillsides and rust red roofs, and a high campanile whose bells, soft across the water, stole to the mental ear. No country in the world has, for me, the breathtaking beauty of Italy.

Teddy peered anxiously at me.

'What were you thinking about? Something *awful*?'

Yes. I was thinking about something awful. I was having a foretaste of what a publisher's reader was to write, two years later, about this diary: 'I have read these chapters with very little interest and a good deal of disgust . . . It is obvious that the author hates war and everything to do with it . . . The book is a study in perversity and you cannot find a book on perversity . . .

Unless later chapters contain something of real value as to the inner workings and high personalities of Amgot, I unhesitatingly recommend its rejection.'

Inner workings and high personalities of institutions, I reflect, as our silver aeroplane glides up the Conca d'Oro towards the blue mountains of Palermo, are not what I write about. Not what any sensible person writes about. One writes of beauty or horror or squalor as memory or imagination divulges them. One writes of experience and not to order. The important thing is that I am flying as a conquering (but rather dull) soldier into an enemy country which I love: and what are my feelings about it and how do I come to do it in this year of grace 1943, in this year of events which may be only dreams, figments of my own imagination in that 'experience' which occurs between truth and death? One peers into the kaleidoscope of memory, and the queer coloured pieces fall into new, meaningless patterns.

Chapter Eight

*Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen bluhn?
Im dunklen Laub die Gold-Orangen gluhn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht –
Kennst du es wohl? Dahin! Dahin!*

GOETHE

*... what trash is Rome,
what rubbish and what offal, when it serves
For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar!*

JULIUS CAESAR ACT I SCENE III

IN THIS RATHER erratic manner I came at last to Italy in 1943, and, apart from a few brief interludes, I have never left it since. Nor have I for an instant regretted that decision. In another year I shall have lived in it longer than in any other country, the only comparable period being in England up to my eighteenth year. Such expatriation must, I suppose, affect the character. *Inglese italianato, diavolo incarnato?* I shouldn't be surprised. What does surprise me is that everyone in the world doesn't want to live in Italy. No other country offers, in so small a compass, so great a wealth of natural beauty, of man's greatest handiwork, and of human courtesy and kindness. My years in Italy have been the happiest of my life. That does not imply disloyalty to my native England, though it does breed some regret for present Britain. English literature, English poetry, and the pastoral heart of England are unique and unsurpassed: but the nineteenth century conception of Great Britain, Rule Britannia and, to some extent, the British Empire – these, surely, have been mistakes in our history. Kipling, however jingoistic at times, saw it clearly enough in *Recessional*. We have been drunk with power. And, like all great nations, we have been corrupted by it. Thus we are in confusion. We strain at gnats and swallow camels. Every year we kill six thousand innocent people on our roads, and yet contrive to howl if a dozen violent negroes are killed in Africa, or a girl is strangled by a sex maniac. We spend huge sums which we

cannot afford upon armaments which will make not the smallest difference to the fate of our little island. And to do this we destroy by taxation every source of our greatness – aristocracy, leisure, freedom of trade and travel, even the last vestige of respect for good architecture. We talk, how we talk, of generosity and equality and fairplay, but with an overgrown population shouting for higher wages, can never afford to lose economic domination over others. The English are a charming people, but the façade of Britian needs pulling down. Somewhere behind it lies the real England, the England of Shakespeare, the England which could produce him.

Palermo, when I came to it in 1943, was a town terribly and most unnecessarily wrecked by Allied bombardment. Looking at the ruined houses along the lovely waterfront, who would not ask what purpose had been served by such barbaric destruction? The Liberation of Italy! The liberation of a rose by a sledgehammer. The rose would grow again, no doubt. And who could be blamed, after all? Mussolini, mesmerised by Hitler, encouraged by the failure of the Hoare-Laval pact, had failed to realize that Italy can never afford to fight a maritime power.

We were instructed, I cannot now think by whom, to report to Generals Spofford and Gueterbock. They sounded like a brand of champagne, but proved not nearly so invigorating. It should be explained that in the Allied Control Commission, and indeed in all administrative units in the Italian campaign, everything had to be controlled by Anglo-American twins. British colonel, American major: American colonel, British major: and so on. No jealousy, chaps, and fair play for mutual spying. The whole meal of Italy must be eaten with an American knife, and a British fork, or vice versa. There were some French spoons too, and long ones: Russian tin-openers also appeared now and then. We found Generals Spofford and Gueterbock (perhaps feeling rather irritatingly ungeneralish in Amgot) polite but not enthusiastic about us. It took us a long time to see them at all, and when we did, they said that they knew nothing about us, and perhaps we might sometime be of use somewhere, and that was that. With some difficulty (and a lot of stick-tapping by Teddy) we got ourselves billeted in a tiny and very hideous villa, abandoned by its presumably Fascist owners. It was superbly uncomfortable: there was of course no light or water: drawers and cupboards had been flung open, clothes and papers scattered at random. Obviously

we could have looted what we liked with impunity: it was an odd feeling. We could not resist looking through letters and papers. 'No, it's awful,' said Teddy. 'We are being disgusting, we mustn't - extremely fascinating, I must admit.' So we went out and looked at churches.

After a few days I landed a quite unofficial job with a Colonel Gayre. He was controlling Education, which meant that he had to sort out teachers and textbooks as quickly as possible, and get the schools going again in a (oh dear) democratic manner. It was a peculiar experience. No teacher, of course, would admit that he or she had ever been Fascist. The school textbooks were a revelation: and I now much regret that I did not keep some of them. At the time such evidence seemed to me better forgotten. I had known a good deal of anti-British feeling in India, but never anything which remotely approached the obscene cartoons of the British which had been provided for Italian children. I marvel today that any Italian who was schooled in those days can look upon an Englishman with aught but horror. Perhaps the period was mercifully brief: in any case, the Italians are not a people to cherish hatreds. But those books dented my mind for ever with the fact that all nationalism is the enemy of peace. All nationalism, white or brown or black or yellow. Nationalism and patriotism are foul perversions of the human spirit.

All of a sudden I was summoned to Gueterbock. There was a perfect hue and cry for me. I felt rather like a small boy who had been sent for by the Headmaster, and found hiding in the bushes. 'Where on earth have you *been?*' said Gueterbock. And he proceeded to tell me that I had written a Most Imprudent Letter about the musty superfluity of Americans, which had been opened by the censor. I opened my mouth to argue about freedom of opinion, but he waved a deprecatory hand. 'Don't do it again. What I have to tell you is that General Joyce requires you urgently. You must get off to Naples this evening.' I was not very clear as to who General Joyce was and what he did: and enquired what I was wanted for. 'Public Relations, I understand,' said Gueterbock. So my chicken had come home to roost. I left that night on a ship which appeared to be full of shells to the very brim, and on them I slept.

General Joyce was no longer young. He was a kind old boy with pince-nez. Rumour had it that he had been Eisenhower's military teacher, and for this reason had been given control of

the Allied Commission. (Or perhaps it was still known as Amgot.) With him I flew off from Naples for Brindisi. It was piercingly cold. For some reason which now seems strange, the pilot was unable to get over the mountains. For about an hour we banked terrifyingly above and between snow-covered pinnacles. Then a member of the crew came in and informed the general that we should have to go down by the Gulf of Taranto. Halfway across it, the aeroplane made a tremendous lurch and dive, which scattered us all on the floor: and General Joyce's pince-nez were momentarily lost, but happily discovered intact. The pilot came in and apologised: there was, he said, a messerschmidt above us, which was bombing a ship: he had had to take evasive action. He seemed alarmed, and commented that we were unharmed. General Joyce adjusted his pince-nez, and said: 'I don't think they can possibly know that I am aboard' – a lovely example of egotism which did not entirely comfort me.

Brindisi is not, at the best of time, an attractive town. We – the small nucleus of the Allied Control Commission – were grouped in a very squalid little hotel on the dockside. The King, the Crown Prince, and Marshal Badoglio, rump of the Government of Italy, were accommodated in a little castle. It was apparent that nothing much was going on, and that of that nothing much I was expected to do the least possible. General Joyce already had an American Public Relations Officer named Cade: and neither he nor Cade wanted any British interference. I had been imported only to make a British twin, as regulations demanded. I was told nothing and did nothing. For the moment that did not much matter: it was one step better than Tizi-ousu: but I chafed a little. Presently Bari was badly bombed, and General Joyce decided that this was too near for comfort. It was arranged (and we had no choice) that we should all spend every night at Santa Cesarea, which is at the very tip of Italy's heel. It was some sixty-four miles from Brindisi. In a mad procession of jeeps, command cars, and lorries, we made this journey twice a day at breakneck speed, with the sullen and anti-Allied inhabitants of Apulia providing obstacles in the shape of large boulders at various points along the frightful roads.

At Santa Cesarea there was a new but not quite finished hotel, which was clean but freezing. Arriving there at ten or eleven at night, we got our frozen limbs to bed, and arose again at six, to repeat the race to an office in which I, at any rate, did nothing. There was nothing particular to complain of, but you must admit

that it was peculiar. The fact was that neither General Joyce nor, I suspect, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, knew what to do about Military Government in a country which was half at peace and half at war, and, which was half occupied by the representatives of four different nations with different ideas. It was too peculiar to last.

And so, one morning, without the smallest warning, General Joyce and all his American staff were gone. They had flitted during the night. We, the British remnant, were left in a sort of politico-military fog. (At least I was: maybe some of the more distinguished, such as Gerald Upjohn KC, knew and would not tell). The fog was dispersed by the bulldog jaw and hunched shoulders of General Sir Noel Mason MacFarlane, straight from the Rock of Gibraltar. I took one look at him, and thought that my number was up. Not at all; for some strange reason he approved of me (At any rate then.) 'Got to get over to Naples at once,' he growled through clenched dentures. 'This Brindisi business absurd. You take over Public Relations. Find a staff. Sack anyone you like. Leave it to you.' We flew off to Naples that day. Mason Mac was a lovable man. Outwardly he was a braggart and a bully: he affected a beret, and, even in a snow-storm, shorts: he put on all the airs of a dictator. Behind the façade there was a nervous, worried soul, not very sure of itself and longing to be loved. He came to regard me, I fear, as a tiresome bore, and I was sorry about that. But much later, after the war, when he was an old man crippled with arthritis, I went to see him often, and he was not only pleased by these visits, but became amiable and told me a lot about himself. He certainly did not have an easy time with the Allied Commission.

It now suddenly became apparent that in the various regions and units of the Allied Commission, scattered over Southern Italy, there were quite a number of Public Relations Officers, and that they were all American, and all tough. To sort them out was not easy. The general idea seemed to be that 'the British doan know a thing abaht publicity'. Author of that remark was Jack Leacacos of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*. Jack, who stayed with me until the end of the war, is one of the rudest and angriest men I have ever encountered, but he somehow manages to combine this with charm, and is one of the hardest and most conscientious workers I have met. We had as Secretary an English sergeant named Cash, a rock in any crisis. And later I managed, after a lot of persuasion, to attract Major Tom Bergin, now Master of

Timothy Dwight College at Yale. He was a great acquisition, and became (as he has remained) a witty, wise, and valued friend. Such were the pillars of my staff. Were any of us necessary? I doubt it. I think the war would have been won without us. A PRO is not much use in any case: we were particularly badly placed because, although there was a quite good story to tell about Allied Military Government, it was always overshadowed by war news. I was, among other things, censor of the theatre, and we sat on an Allied Publications Board which was supposed to control the Italian press. I also had the unenviable job of controlling the Italian Minister of Information, Signor Spataro. The idea, theoretically, was that the Italian Government – nominated by the Allies but not yet, of course, elected – was a collection of naughty little boys who had to be taught democracy by us their masters, though their dignity must not be impaired. It was not a role in which I fancied myself, and I hope that if Signor Spataro (who is a Minister in the Italian Government today) reads these words, he will realize how hard I tried to keep out of his way, though our parallel courses involved a good deal of work. At this time I also started two publications which later landed me in some troubles. One was a précis – which it somehow amused me to do – of the despatches sent by Allied correspondents: and this became very popular. The other was called the Weekly Bulletin, and was a summary of activities in the Allied Commission: Tom Bergin and I found it a tempting opportunity for pulling authoritative legs, and sometimes we went too far. We also ran about Italy, noting the progress made in shattered towns and villages. But perhaps our only really useful function was the nannying of correspondents, who were always wanting information, or a bed, or a car. So pressing did these needs become that I eventually took over the old Manchurian Embassy in Rome as a club where correspondents could find bed and board. That was (thank God) my only experience of running a boarding-house, and I should have run it at a hideous loss had it not been for the bar, which just made the budget balance. All in all, there was quite a lot to do, however pointless it may have been.

That Neapolitan winter was surprisingly cold. I had been in Italy often enough. I had never realized that it was one thing to stay in a warm hotel with the sun shining, and quite another to work in offices and sleep in bare billets when all windows were blown out by air raids. Despite the Bay of Naples, it all tended to be rather squalid and dreary. The tremendous exception was

the eruption of Vesuvius which, though not so dangerous as the war, dwarfed it in sound and fury. At that time I was living in a rather ramshackle flat near the docks with Christopher Lumby of *The Times* and Cecil Sprigge of Reuters and *The Manchester Guardian*: Teddy Croft-Murray, when in Naples (he had now become a busy man) made a fourth. At around midnight one evening, I noticed two streaks of red near the crater and pointed them out to Cecil and Christopher. Cecil trotted off at once to cable this bit of news: I thought he was daft, but he was quite right. Next day Vesuvius was belching red-hot boulders to the skies. By evening the spectacle was so grand that everyone in Naples who had a car – and there were plenty – went to have a closer look. The result was pandemonium. The Allied Commission decided to close the roads leading to the crater, and to me, the dogsbody, was assigned what I can only call the task of supervising the eruption, and signing passes for those whose genuine business took them to the villages on the slopes of the mountain. There was already an Italian Professor, with the rather unlikely name of Imbo, 'in charge of Vesuvius'. He was a nice little man, and he had an observatory perched on a crest near the crater. From this vantage-point I was able to watch the furious furnace of nature in action, and the two wide rivers of molten lava which flowed down towards the villages. Imbo was the spirit of caution. 'Will it get worse?' 'It may: perhaps it will not.' 'Will the lava reach the villages?' 'It did in 1890.' Suddenly one day Vesuvius gave a mammoth puff, and up to the sky went swirling a cloud which looked like the pictures of atomic explosion today. 'Is that ash, and will it come down on us?' 'Well, it might be light ash or heavy ash: it might come down or be blown away,' I could get no sense out of Imbo. I took a party of correspondents to Pompeii: ash was raining down, and occasionally a bit of coke gave one a sharp rap: we all had handkerchiefs to our noses. I said to Godfrey Talbot: 'We look exactly the casts in the museum,' and wondered if the same fate would be ours. Presently the whole area was covered with ash, sometimes two feet deep, and dense clouds of sulphurous smoke poured from Vesuvius. It was early spring, and the almond trees were in blossom: one could advance to the lava streams, twelve feet high and forty yards across, and red-hot, moving at a steady twelve feet a minute, and watch the pink blossom mown down. Never had I seen, nor shall I see again, such extraordinary tricks of lights and colour. Soon the villages were menaced. The inhabitants would not believe it. Plaster saints

were taken out of the churches and placed along the roads, staring up at the boiling crater. It became obvious that, unless the eruption suddenly stopped, the various villages would be overwhelmed at an exact hour. But we could not persuade the Italians to go: they still believed in a miracle. Then, quite suddenly, they panicked, and long lines of lorries took them – and what furniture they could rescue – away. Attached to me were two American photographers, very reminiscent of Laurel and Hardy, and they had a whale of a time. It was indeed a camera-man's Paradise. The very slow but seemingly inevitable advance of the red-hot river was astonishingly impressive. From a distance of twenty yards or even less, one could watch it pouring into the back of a house: then, very very slowly, the façade would bulge outwards and crack: suddenly, as the lava reached the cellars, barrels of wine would explode in pink fountains: then, hey presto, the house silently collapsed, and the lava was on its way again. It gave one a curious end-of-the-world feeling. And in its way, it was beautiful.

I had a jeep-driver (officers, I cannot imagine why, were strictly forbidden to drive themselves) called James. He hailed from Cardiff and was a perfect example of all that is best – and what a good best it is – in the English private soldier. In these egalitarian days, it is difficult to express appreciation of such people without sounding patronizing. James had an unsophisticated, innocent, yet shrewd view of the world, and very often picked out points of interest which I should never have noticed. I was entranced by his description of a free fight which took place in Rome between British soldiers and French *poilus*, who lived in barracks opposite one another. The French imported tarts every night, and the British took exception to this, and raided them. It was one of the examples of sexual prejudice in occupied Rome. Another was the fact that most British officers went and lived quietly at the Eden hotel, which was assigned to them, while most American officers felt it imperative to set themselves up in a requisitioned flat and keep a mistress. This gave rise to quite considerable anger on both sides. Among the British, there were legends to the effect that the Americans were impotent, and were doing this only for show: and anyway (a common grouse) that they had too much money. The Americans quite often said that the British must indulge in homosexuality or masturbation. The French, of course, indulged in everything: and their coloured troops, the Goums, soon gave us a headache.

They would rush into a village and loot it, raping all the women. As a result, a great many Italians fled at their approach, and blocked the roads. After a lot of quite painful negotiation, the Goums were sent home: what experience I had of these talks made me feel that the French are as cruel and ruthless a nation as any in the world – or perhaps that applies only to the French Army. Certainly in a conquered country, with women at two a penny, odd national differences appear.

In Naples I would occasionally say to James: 'One of these days, James, I shall be able to say "Rome, James".' When I did this he would give me a hostile and contemptuous glance, thinking (quite rightly) that I was making some stale and incomprehensible joke. The day did in due course arrive, and when we topped the Alban Hills, and looked down at the Eternal City, just fallen, intact and unspoiled, to the Allies, and I said, with a lump in my throat (for it seemed a great moment) 'That is Rome, James,' he replied morosely 'Is it now? An' I wish it were Lunnon' – thus extinguishing my flicker of sentimentality. Nevertheless the shining splendour of Rome, after the squalor of London and the bombed cities of England and Palermo and Naples, seemed almost incredible. Civilization had, after all, survived.

The brilliance of Rome was a little dimmed for me by a personal assignment with tragedy. In the sparkling Egypt of 1918 my cousin, Sir Ian Macleod, had married a lively, intelligent and attractive Italian named Isa Brusati. He must have been (I scarcely knew him) a singularly unimaginative man, for he took her off to live in the high dark and hideous house of his mother in the centre of Glasgow. A girl of seventeen, brought up in the sunshine of Italy and Egypt, was thus condemned to live under the thumb of a domineering and tyrannical old woman in the gloomiest city in the world. Isa stood it for ten or twelve years, and then mustered courage to escape to Rome, where she took a very beautiful apartment looking down over the Pincian Gardens and the Trinità dei Monti to St Peters. Ian, her son, grew up into a dazzling blend of the Latin and Anglo-Saxon. He had the charm and flexibility and gaiety of the Italian, and the phlegm, integrity, and perseverance of the Englishman. In 1939 he started to work at the British Embassy in Rome, and, when Italy declared war, departed with the Ambassador to England. Devoted to Isa, he tried to persuade her to go with him: she refused. Perhaps the idea of Glasgow deterred her: perhaps she

thought (as anyone might have done at the time) that England would lose the war. Ian never relaxed his efforts to get her away: he arranged a passage for her through Switzerland: she would not budge. Ian meanwhile distinguished himself as a soldier: when we got to Italy, he commanded a group of Partisans which he sent to reconnoitre in enemy territory with useful results. At his funeral, I was deeply impressed by their smartness and intelligence. He died – stupidly it seemed – in Naples from osteomyelitis, contracted from a small bump on the knee in a motor-cycle accident. I sent the news of his death to Isa via the Foreign Office and the Vatican: I could not face the prospect of breaking it myself. When at length I sat in her drawing-room in Rome, she flung open the double doors and stood, draped in mourning and with her fair hair dyed black. Pointing a finger at me, she declaimed: ‘Why did you let it happen?’ Had I let it happen, I wondered. I had been busy, and for some time had not realized that he was gravely ill. When I did, Mason MacFarlane had been unforgettably kind about it: a specialist had been brought down from the line: great quantities of penicillin (then a rarity) had been flown over from North Africa. But the aristocracy of Naples, who knew both Isa and Ian, insisted that the British doctors were no good, and that an Italian doctor could cure him. The British authorities were adamant: no Italian doctor could visit the British military hospital. All this, of course, came back to the ears of Isa. She blamed me, the British doctors, the Allies, and the world. She wished to visit his grave, and when permission was refused (civilians could not travel to Naples) she wept and stormed: ‘I, a British mother, may not visit my son’s grave!’ When his possessions were brought to her she swore that they had been pilfered, and that his Will was missing. There was no doing anything for her. The purpose of her life was gone. Some people recover from such losses, some do not. Isa never did, and never has. Her grief and fury ran like a black thread through my Roman days. It is said that those who mourn are blessed, but she was not comforted.

There was one other cloud in the Roman sky, and that was the behaviour of the Allied troops. When, some weeks earlier, it became clear that Rome would fall, detailed arrangements were made for its occupation. I don’t know where these originated – perhaps among the Combined Chiefs of Staff, perhaps with Alexander. The idea was that Rome should be left intact. No Allied troops were to enter it. The Allied Commission was to be

billeted in Tivoli, and from that discreet distance watch over law and order in the Eternal City. It was, perhaps, an impossible conception: it broke down at once. General Mark Clark, commanding the Fifth Army, said that his boys deserved a good time, and sent them into the city in batches of fifteen thousand. Other commanders, I suppose, followed suit. Spacious shining Rome became a bedraggled whore of a town. It was as though Vivaldi had suddenly changed to Louis Armstrong. Italian vendors poured on to the pavements with the wares apparently required – terrible sham jewellery, huge cameos, pots painted with the Stars and Stripes, hideous scarves. Pimps multiplied. At night along the Via Veneto Allied soldiers lay in a drunken stupor. It was not pretty. All right, it could be said – do you prefer this tolerant uproar or the Ardeatine massacres and the torture chambers of the Via Tasso? You could only reply, with Matthew Arnold: Madman or slave, *must* man be one?

The Italian press also was bursting with liberation and freedom. Freedom (of course, why not?) to say what it liked about the Allies. So the Allied Publications Board was hurriedly formed. Its Chairman, Ian Munro, was a gentle and tolerant man: other members were not. The proceedings verged on the farcical. Could the King be caricatured? Yes of course, he's a Fascist. No, you can't attack the Monarchy. Anyway they'll have to vote for it – why shouldn't they be informed. Informed? Misled? Pooh, you're a Monarchist. No, but this is going too far. And just look at this about Winston, we can't pass it. Seems to me innocuous. Well, that's a treasonable remark. Well, what do we do? Have the Editor on the carpet? A lot of good *that* will do! Suppress the paper? Heavens, think of the Labour Party! And so on.

General 'Jumbo' Wilson, C.-in-C Mediterranean, decided that there must be a Report on German Atrocities in Rome. Dogsbody Fielden got this job, of course. I protested that it was not at all up my street: no good. So I set Jack Leacacos to work on it: between us I think we interviewed 175 people who had been tortured in the Via Tasso. The result was inconclusive. I remember in particular one young man, intelligent, well-spoken, of good family. Had he been tortured? Oh yes. For how long? Oh, about three weeks. What happened? Well, first a bit of beating up in the cellar: four men to knock him about. Badly hurt? Well, no: fainted very quickly. Any scars? No. And then? Oh, well, beating with steel birches. Terrible? No, not really: fainted at once. Any scars? No. And then? Oh well then, fire, you know:

flames in the armpits, under the testicles, and so on. Any scars? No. But you didn't divulge information? Lord, no, never occurred to me. What does one make of all that? Jack sifted every detail of information: never was there such a sifter: but it all added up to nothing. However, about the Ardeatine massacre there was no doubt: the Italians had ambushed a German lorry and killed thirty Germans: the Germans had demanded 300 Italians as a reprisal, and killed them all in the Ardeatine caves. The then Chief of Police in Rome, Caruso, had been instructed to supply fifty from the prisons, and had done so. He, escaping northwards, had been caught by an Allied bomb, and had his hip shattered. He was the first real Fascist prisoner. The Italians must put him on trial – so they were informed.

Moroni, the judge of this trial, took the crazy decision to advertise, in the Italian papers, that all widows of the Ardeatine dead would be welcome in court. As a result, the court was crowded with hysterical women. I was supposed to be looking after the journalists, who were there in force: and, to some extent – though that was never officially conveyed to me – after the whole trial. I took a young American officer of my staff, Atkinson, down to the court, because I was far too busy to attend the whole trial. I did not much like the atmosphere of weeping women, but it did not then occur to me that anything could go seriously wrong. There was a man called Caretta, who had been Deputy Chief of Police to Caruso and who had agreed to give evidence against him. When Caretta entered the court the crowd (who did not know Caruso by sight) started to shout 'That's Caruso!' and there was a movement towards him. I told Atkinson to take him up to the gallery, where the crowd could not reach him. I then rushed away to keep my office appointments. Caretta, unfortunately for him, decided to run out of the court. The crowd ran after him, threw him into the Tiber, saw that he was well and truly drowned, and hung him upside down on the walls of the Regina Coeli prison. Atkinson brought me this news at midday. The trial had to be moved to a less accessible and more guarded court, and I scarcely dared to leave it for the following three weeks. At the end of that time Caruso, as was inevitable, was condemned to death, and Allied journalists had the greatest fun in photographing and filming both him and the judge at the moment of sentence.

Before this trial, and during it, I had come to know two wonderful people. They were named Pollock and Coxhead, one

a major and the other a colonel, but in fact Scotland Yard policemen. They were the perfect answer to all violence. 'Your police are wonderful!' says the film-star. Well, these two were. A few days before the fall of Paris to the Allies, a crowd of Romans, some 5,000 strong, surged into the Piazza Farnese, wishing to cheer the French Ambassador. Couve de Murville chose to ignore them, since Paris had not yet fallen. The crowd became restive, and started to jeer at a Carabinieri station on a corner of the square. A man from the crowd ran up to the balcony, tore down the flag of Savoy, and ran up a red one. A Carabinieri rushed out, tackled him, and threw the red flag into the Square. 'Burn them out!' shouted the crowd. It was an ugly moment. Then Pollock and Coxhead, wearing shorts and shirts and quite unarmed, drove into the square in a jeep. Someone threw the red flag in Coxhead's face. Coxhead gave him a beautiful upper-cut and sent him twenty yards. The crowd began to laugh. Pollock and Coxhead proceeded to the balcony, and put up the Savoy flag with great deliberation. The crowd cheered them. I thought that maybe I was prejudiced, but it really seemed that the English, and only the English in the whole wide world, know how to deal with crowds. Coxhead and Pollock became my heroes. And they (I think and hope) rather liked me. They brought me a lot of their problems. The worst of these was the Regina Coeli prison, in which the Allies (or rather their damnable Security Services) had immured hundreds of quite innocent people. Conditions in this star-shaped prison were frightful. To give only one example, we came upon three old sisters, all in their eighties, who had been thrown into a crowded cell because they had been found sewing German uniforms. Coxhead and Pollock did a great job, but it was uphillwork: the Allied authorities simply did not care. During the Caruso trial, Coxhead and Pollock were in some way responsible - such responsibilities were vague - for his custody and treatment. They visited him daily and came, as I also did, to like him. The accusation against him was that he had signed the order to hand over fifty prisoners to the Germans. He did not deny it: his defence was simply that, he was doing what he was instructed by his Government to do. Had he refused, he would have been shot. It was a nice point. To understand it, you had to imagine an England dominated by Russian 'allies' who were hated by the people: and ask yourself how far, under such circumstances, the Head of Scotland Yard would have gone. Caruso was executed at Fort Brevetta outside

Rome, and died bravely under the eyes of some fifty Western correspondents. Strapped to a chair with his back to the firing-squad, he threw up his head just before the volley, and in ringing tones shouted: '*Evviva l'Italia!*' Then a dozen correspondents rushed on the body to take nice close-ups for their readers. Caruso, during his last night in the cells, wrote a moving letter to Pollock and Coxhead, thanking them for their kindness to him, saying that he had come to admire and respect them greatly, but that, for his part, he remained convinced that Fascism was the best form of Government ever devised.

It was about this time that I received a telegram announcing my father's death. This was quite unexpected: I had known he was ill, but I had never quite believed that he would die: he was tough. I cannot honestly say that I felt the slightest sorrow: he was a man whom I had never known or liked. I did, however, feel a considerable curiosity as to whether he had (as in 1914 he had threatened) cut me off with a shilling. Some time elapsed – I was not allowed to return to England – before I knew that I was the sole residuary legatee of some £120,000. More time was to elapse before I realized that taxation and other legacies took two-thirds of this, and that no less than seven years were needed to 'settle the estate'. However, I did undoubtedly feel a lift of the heart to think that perhaps I was now free from bosses and the necessity to work. Yet it is an odd experience to inherit money, and, at least to me, not quite the unalloyed pleasure that one would expect. A pay packet for work at the end of each month seems natural and right: but an unearned income seems unreal. I have never got used to it. I am always convinced that it will disappear. I should like it to be under the mattress. I have known quite a few people who, towards the end of their lives, became absolutely convinced that they were penniless, and this seems to me easy to understand. It is possible that the possession of an unearned income automatically makes one more nervous about money – and therefore less generous – than one ever was while earning. That does not mean that I don't like having money – it's great fun – or that I am not everlastingly grateful for the privacy which it gives me. But it does mean that my dreams are haunted by a constant dread that it will disappear before I do. I suspect that, as the years roll on, I grasp every penny with a meaner hand.

In July 1944 Mason MacFarlane resigned on grounds of ill-health, and returned to England. It was, in a way, a forced re-

signation. When Rome fell, Mason Mac decided that the Southern Italian Government, nominated by the Allies under Badoglio, Sforza and Togliatti, should fly to Rome and there meet the secretly formed government of Bonomi – and freely decide who was to rule. That strange meeting took place in a small room at the Grand Hotel. Mason Mac addressed the politicians, and made, I thought, a good speech, perhaps slightly weighted towards Bonomi. It was translated – to me very badly translated – by an American interpreter called Montfort. The result was that Marshall Badoglio threw in his hand. (Possibly he would have done so anyway: more than once he said to me, laughing: ‘Not my job, politics.’) Churchill went into a fury over this. He sent Mason Mac a surprisingly rude cable, insisting that Badoglio, who had signed the Armistice terms, should be reinstated as Prime Minister. That was obviously impossible. Mason Mac, who was subject to acute arthritis from an injury to his spine, became ill with worry. His arms were, in fact, partially paralysed from the elbow down. Sitting dejectedly in the Grand Hotel before his last Press Conference, he said to me: ‘Am I supposed to act democratically, or not?’ (He was so angered by Churchill that he later contested and won a Labour seat.) The American correspondents scented a row, and harried me unmercifully to admit that Churchill had sacked Mason Mac for not being Fascist.

MacFarlane was succeeded by his deputy, an American called Ellery Stone. Ellery Stone held the rank of Captain in the Navy. He was a shrewd business man, but he did not carry enough guns, in rank or personality, for the job: such, at least, was my impression. It may well have been a biased one. Ellery Stone, like General Joyce, wanted an American, not a British, Public Relations Officer. He wanted, quite naturally, to be promoted to Admiral (as he eventually was), and for that purpose it was essential, or so he thought, that his personality should be played up by the American press. But I had no standing with, or knowledge of, that press: and Tom Bergin, though a wise man, was far from being a journalist. It would have been quite reasonable, from Ellery Stone’s point of view, to shunt us both; but he had no good reason for doing so. There was nothing against us, and our job, as far as it went, was efficiently done. Ellery Stone, for some reason that I shall never understand, was enamoured of my weekly précis of Allied correspondents’ despatches. This, he said, must now appear daily. I protested violently. I tried to explain that in Naples I had had the time

to talk with the correspondents and to do the *précis* with care. It could be a dangerous thing if not carefully handled: and in Rome I no longer had the time to do it personally. He thrust these objections aside. Anybody could do it. I agreed, and thus dug my own grave. I handed over the *précis* to a young English officer who could write shorthand. I endeavoured to warn him about its dangers. It began to come out every day, and was sent to seventy-three General Officers. Doom was in store for me.

Florence had been captured, and the Allies moved northwards. The aspect of Florence was not encouraging for liberators. With bridges destroyed, buildings in ruins, and rubble-heaped streets, it seemed at first sight a town whose glories had departed. Indeed, when I visit it today, I never cease to marvel that it has so nearly re-assumed its original form. Arriving there after its capture I was billeted with other officers in the Excelsior Hotel, and felt that I must escape from this khaki mass at once. I walked in the twilight to the Ponte Vecchio, with the idea of re-visiting the tower in which I had lived in the twenties. It had been blown up, and not a vestige remained. This trivial incident depressed me. Next morning I walked along the Arno, determined to find some of the Italians I had known. A woman at a window was speaking to a boy on the pavement below: she interrupted herself to say in Italian, looking at me: 'I think that officer looks nice: reminds me of Grandfather: go and speak to him.' I was tickled by this remark, and joined in the conversation: and in this way I met Elle Mèani, surely one of the most amusing, unpredictable, irritating women ever born in Florence. She took me there and then to Leland's Bar, where many Florentines were gathered: from there, with the Marchesa Strozzi, we drove up to the famous Tatti, Bernard Berenson's villa at Settignano. There, it seemed as if the war had never taken place: everything was somewhere in 1905: the two charming sisters, Nicky Mariano and Alda von Anrep, moved like duchesses among the guests: the famous BB was, as ever, the soul of wit and courtesy. Suddenly I was caught up into this enchanted little world, swimming it seemed in some dimension untouched by war. And this, though I was unaware of it, decided my future.

In Rome Herbert Matthews, renowned correspondent for *The New York Times*, decided to write an article about the views of the new King, Umberto. This was, of course, a tricky thing to do. The House of Savoy was walking a tightrope. Its future was uncertain, it was – to some eyes – tarred with a Fascist brush, and

Umberto, a pleasant man dragged hither and thither by unkind circumstance, had not quite made his personality felt. Whether Matthews wished to smear or extol the Monarchy, or to do neither, I don't know. What came out was an article in which Umberto, asked by Matthews: 'Why did not you and your father stop Mussolini?' replied (as far as I remember the words); 'Because every Italian would have been against us.' Matthews covered this article by a note to his Editor, saying that the article had been seen and approved by the Prime Minister, Bonomi, and the ex-Prime Minister, Orlando. The article appeared in *The New York Times*, and in due course came back to Italy, where it caused a crisis. Italians were furious with the King. Bonomi, frightened, denied that he had ever seen it. My précis had stated that he had, and Ellery Stone, seizing the opportunity, said that it was all my fault. I could only retort that my précis had gone to him and seventy-three generals a fortnight earlier, and none had objected. Matthews left for America. Ellery Stone now had a case against me. John Boettinger (if that is his name, but he was not a man whose name I should remember) the son-in-law of Roosevelt, came to Italy. My American staff were paralyzed by this alleged VIP, and assured me that my fate depended upon him. I took no trouble with him. Very soon I was informed that Roosevelt had appointed a new Public Relations Officer to the Allied Commission. I should be required to work 'on equal terms with him.' I said that I would do nothing of the kind. The department had run under my supervision for eighteen months, and I would run it or clear out. It was, of course, a childish sort of squabble. And it was quite clear that I should lose the game, and that Ellery Stone would delightedly exile me to the most remote and squalid town of Italy, where (as far as one could see at that time) I might be immured for years. I should not have minded that, but a complicated situation was developing about my father's estate: both lawyers and family were demanding my presence. I did not want to get stuck. So I wrote to the Secretary of State for War, and asked him to recall me, which he obligingly did. It is good to have a friend at court. I was tempted to cock a snook at Ellery Stone.

Social life in occupied Rome has found no place in these random recollections: and perhaps it deserves one. Had I been less tied by office routine, I should have seen more of it. But certainly Rome in 1944-46 was a Paradise for an Allied officer. It may be wrong to conquer countries and occupy them, but the

occupier has – at least for a time – an amusing experience, if he so desires. The Allied officer in Rome was run after, petted, flattered, and entertained: and the Roman aristocracy was, after all, an old hand at entertaining magnificently. Moreover, with the nice new bank notes printed by the Allies (and stamped with the Four Freedoms, none of which are in great evidence today), there was a sense of affluence. An Allied officer could, more or less, get away with anything, and that in the world's most beautiful city.

In April 1945 I flew off from Rome, and found myself landed, rather surprisingly, in Cornwall. The war was as good as over, and I told myself, perhaps over-optimistically, that never again (unless reincarnation was a fact) would I become involved in men's massacres of each other. At least, I thought, I should have the money, and the conviction, to run away from them as far and as fast as I could. But the antics of the human race have now made even that proposition doubtful.

Business affairs are boring: for the rest of that summer I was overwhelmed by them. When the debts and legacies and death duties had been paid, the house and its contents sold, my step-mother established elsewhere and thousands (it seemed to me) of dreary lawyers' conferences attended, I returned to the flat in London which I still held on an annual lease. It was a dark pill-box of a place, filthily dirty now, and it stank of war memories: almost one seemed to hear bombs still dropping. I now possessed (or would presumably, when the estate was settled, possess) a gross income of some £2,500 a year, which taxation reduced to £1,200. And I was, of course, free to spend the capital sum of about £40,000 as fast as I liked. It was a quite enviable position. Will you be surprised if I tell you that I felt desperately depressed, extremely lonely, and entirely lost? But that is what I did feel.

I could have entertained people: I had no desire to do so. I could have gone out to parties: the idea revolted me. I sat like a mangy mouse in the dirty little flat, dusting the furniture (I could not find a charwoman) and cooking myself horrid little messes in the doll's kitchen. For thirty years I had been, more or less and often pointlessly, active, and had thought that I hated that thrall-dom: now the Gods offered me freedom and leisure on a plate, and, believe it or not, I had not the remotest idea what to do with them. I was so idiotically conditioned by social convention that I could not envisage the notion of doing nothing. So I looked care-

fully through the advertisements for jobs, and eventually answered one which said that the Allied War Crimes Commission needed a Public Relations Officer. I sent in a list of my achievements which now, on paper, looked impressive. In due course I was summoned to an interview in that Headquarters of Vengeance, suitably established at Church House, Westminster.

Selection Boards, as I have said earlier, are futile things. You can seldom hope by interview to judge candidates who are inevitably too nervous to behave normally. But in this particular case the situation was unusual. I was in my fiftieth year and had said good-bye to nervousness. I had a private income, and therefore was indifferent. I did not take to the Selection Board which, under the chairmanship of Lord Wright, was composed of representatives of various victorious nations. (Or perhaps, in some cases, semi-victorious.) There was a curious feeling of arrogance: they seemed to be licking their chops. I was asked questions about my career, and the answers sounded quite good. I was aware that I was making a good impression, and my instinct was to withdraw. I said that I did not quite understand (which was true enough) what the Allied War Crimes Commission was supposed to do: I went further, and insisted that I might be the wrong person for it: I abased myself, and urged them to realize that I knew very little about Public Relations, and had really been a complete failure. Such is human nature that the lower I went, the more they thought of me. When I got to the point of saying that I did not think I wanted the job at all, they were convulsed with laughter and admiration. The next day I received a letter to say that the Board had been unanimous in choosing me. Feeling a perfect fool, I put on my pinstripe suit and went to Church House.

The reality was far worse than my anticipation. God knows what I had expected: perhaps I saw myself interviewing Goering & Co, and getting a kick out of it. I was so confused that any activity seemed preferable to none. The reality which confronted me was a horrendous library of files, recording idiotic 'crimes' against all manner of silly little people. A lift-man in Rome had been rude to the Yugoslavs: to the gallows with him. The Mayor of Rien-sur-Mer had said that he admired Laval: off with his head. A chamber-maid in Brussels had refused to sleep with a Russian: to Justice with her. Unfortunately for me, I was known to a large number of newspaper correspondents, and, as soon as my appointment was announced, they were after me. And they

knew their stuff. 'Case number 23052, now if you go ahead with that, we'll make a stink. It's merely a plot to oust Monsieur Rien, Signor Niente, Gospodin Niet, in favour of Fascist or Communist Monsieur Chose.' And so on. What was to be made of all this? I became more uncomfortable. I could not Public-relationize sheer vengeance. It may, perhaps, have been an 'unlucky moment, or possibly I was in a particularly mulish frame of mind. The cases which came up to be examined as 'worthy of trial' seemed mostly based on slender or biased or phoney evidence: the members of the Commission appeared more intent on hanging people than on seeking a peaceful world. One day, feeling ashamed of myself and an utter fool, I told Lord Wright that I had made a mistake, and that I must leave the AWCC that very day. I had been there for about a fortnight. Lord Wright grunted a bit, and said that he hoped that I should not divulge anything that I had learnt there. It was tempting to reply that I had already arranged for a series of scandalous articles. Perhaps Lord Wright felt this. 'We could have made you sign the Official Secrets Act, you know,' he said. I could only reply, 'But you didn't.' Official secrets about War Crimes! Into what world were we moving, had we moved? As I left the sacred precincts of Church House for ever, a new breeze blew about me. What on earth had I been thinking of. I was utterly unfitted, had always been unfitted, for all bureaucratic jobs. I was also unfitted for anything else. It remained to do nothing. And why not? Nothing spread out delightfully before me. I was an old man with groggy health and a private income: why the hell should I do anything?

This decision made, there was instantly a lot to do. Warm letters had been arriving from Florence, urging me to go and settle there: and I could at least begin with that idea. In November 1945 it was impossible to leave England without a reason. I therefore went to Kingsley Martin, and asked him whether he would let me go as unpaid correspondent in Italy. He kindly agreed, and wrote the necessary letter. The first step thus accomplished, I took an enormous second one: I bought a Rolls-Royce. True, it was a second-hand one of 1937 vintage, and cost me only £1,000: on the other hand, it had belonged exclusively to Mrs Victor Bruce, was in excellent condition, pretty, and of low mileage. This acquisition – maybe I should apologise, in these days, for such bad taste – perhaps gave me more pleasure than any I have ever made. Why? Well, because I wanted to show off. If you write yourself down decisively as a failure in life, you must have some-

thing to bolster the ego: behind the wheel of the Rolls I felt that I could spit upon humanity. But I also had to spit successfully on other things, including the Ministry of Information and the French and Italian Embassies. Without their permission I could not start. And the first two were astoundingly reluctant to let me. Various departments of the Ministry of Information blandly assured me that I could not take a car across the Channel, and that even if I did so, I should find no petrol and no food in France: and that, in any case, the car would immediately be stolen. And why on earth, they asked, should I want to go to Italy as a correspondent: there were more than enough there already. The French Embassy repeated most of these warnings, and added that I had better take sufficient food for the whole journey, and a tent to sleep in: I should find neither food nor hotels. (Why I was told these extraordinary lies, I still wonder.) The Italians, as always, were the soul of courtesy: delighted that I should want to go: no difficulty. I extracted the various permits, like so many teeth: then I had to get a *carnet* from the AA. The AA were delightfully comic: they said quite simply, 'But the Continent is closed!' I could only reply that I had been on the Continent for two years, and it didn't seem closed to me. After many interviews and the filling-in of countless forms, I got my *carnet*. The doors of the English prison were open.

Having got so far, I grew slightly nervous. Peter Rodd had come round to my flat and told me, in rather dramatic terms, that my journey would be dangerous. He painted an unpleasant picture (which perhaps was in part true) of deserters from every army who would hold up the car and ransack it, of long empty roads where no help would be available and anarchy would rule, of lines of military lorries chugging along at fifty miles an hour and caring little for civilian cars. I decided to take with me Peter Forster, a member of the BBC staff who had estates in France which he wanted to see, and who was a stout and bilingual fellow. The Rolls was filled, literally to the roof, with every life-preserving commodity I could think of – blankets, sheets, pillows, tins of food, soap, cigarettes . . . I might have been going to the North Pole. At this moment the laughing Gods shot a vile arrow at me, and I was struck down by the most staggering attack of lumbago I have ever experienced. It was the sort of lumbago (which I have never known before or since) which ties you into an immovable knot when you are crossing a street. It had to be cured, and I could not cure it. I ran up and down Harley Street, I went

to every possible osteopath. I was poulticed, rolled about, massaged, boiled: all to no purpose. I creaked myself into the Rolls, and set off to Newhaven. There, a Customs Officer looked unbelievably at the mass of nonsense inside the car, and said 'Have you anything to declare?' in a lost kind of way. I said, yes, ten thousand cigarettes. 'Don't try making fun of me,' he warned. 'How much soap have you?' I said, 'Four dozen.' 'A wag, aren't you?' He chalked the car as passed. It was then lifted on to the ship. The art of lifting cars had been forgotten, and it was bundled unmercifully by the cranes into the hold. By sheer luck, there was no damage. It took four hours to cross from Newhaven to Dieppe. At Dieppe in the twilight the tide was obviously too high, even to my inexperienced eye, to allow the temporary cranes to swing the car clear. The French authorities would not listen to me: the ship must be unloaded at once. So bang, crash, went my beautiful Rolls into the derricks: the windows were shattered, the doors stove in. I argued and shouted till midnight about damages, and who was going to pay them. Useless. We climbed the hill and established ourselves (there were no hotels) in a small brothel. Mercifully the car still functioned: a Rolls always functions. I left it in the garden. My sleep was uneasy: perhaps the Ministry of Information, the French Embassy, and Peter Rodd were right. Perhaps I should return at once. Lumbago haunted my dreams.

Next morning Dieppe provided us with a breakfast such as could not be found in all victorious England. A bank manager, smiling, cashed my enormous cheque immediately. Petrol was available in any quantity. We bowled off southwards on a beautiful straight road. The sun shone. My lumbago vanished. We ate a delicious lunch at Evreux.

And so it went on. Everywhere we found smiling faces, excellent food and wine, admirable hotels, and a great welcome for English travellers – or perhaps for English travellers with a Rolls. Only at Montélimar, where we had planned to stay, did we encounter the aftermath of war. This was at twilight, and we were slightly unnerved – after the various gipsy's warnings – about the long trek to Avignon in the dark. But no: a charming brothel appeared unexpectedly in a village. A cosy Madam: exquisite food, luxurious rooms. In sunshine we trickled on to Monte Carlo. I could not resist the temptation to be as grand as possible. Never before had I driven and never again should I drive, up to the Hotel de Paris in a Rolls. And at the Hotel de

Paris the war of 1939-1945 had not yet been observed. The same expensive ladies sat at the same expensive tables eating the same expensive food served by the same expensive waiters. Delicious! Why wasn't I a subject of Monaco? No: on second thoughts, I couldn't afford it. I did, however, afford to take myself to the tables, where I almost instantly lost almost all my travelling money. We pressed on to Italy. Italy was different. War had hit the Italian Riviera heavily. There were endless diversions where bridges had been blown up. But people were cheerful, and Black Marketeers rushed at us with petrol wherever we stopped. We arrived in Florence without difficulty. As correspondent (unpaid) of *The New Statesman*, I sat down at once and wrote a glowing article about the delights of European travel. I thought that people would be glad to know. *The New Statesman* refused to publish it: Kingsley wrote me a sharp letter, in which he said that everyone in the office was agreed that this horrible description of 'driving a Rolls through ruined Europe' was the most vulgar thing ever submitted to the paper. Vulgar or not, it was true. But one must toe the official line. Occupied France had to be 'ruined' – but, in fact, it was far better off than victorious England.

Chapter Nine

No, Sir, I am not obliged to do any more. No man is obliged to do as much as he can do. A man is to have a part of life to himself

SAMUEL JOHNSON

At Florence I entered upon two years of glorious, irresponsible life. There were plenty of amusing people: money didn't (as I then thought) matter: I toyed – that is the word – with the idea of buying a villa, and, as there were 365 villas for sale, this gave a lovely excuse for picnics. The rarity of pleasure, and of private cars, gave me an easy choice of gay delightful company: what could be more enchanting than to pile into the Rolls and float off along empty roads, luxuriant with the Italian spring, to spend timeless days in great neglected gardens, whose owners had fled or died or lost their money or decided not to return. And these once-tended gardens were perhaps more beautiful, certainly more magical, in their neglect than they had ever been in their days of affluence. Punctuating the landscape, the secular cypress shot from smooth grey bole its spire of velvet darkness into the blue: climbing roses, once so carefully imported and pruned, rioted up to attic windows and rusty roofs; the unconquerable honeysweet wistaria thrust its choking fingers over arbour and trellis, arch and wall: spiraea and forsythia and jasmine, grown to the size of trees, cascaded racemes of white and gold: untended lawns glowed with white and red and purple anemone, scarlet wild tulip, and the soft blue of iris stylosa. And, as always in Italy, the distant prospect, unfolding over Florence or the Appenines or the silver gleam of the Arno, curling across the plain, had the Perugin quality of misty and mysterious blue. It was good, it was enough, to be alive in such a world. And the vague, the very vague, idea that one of these lost villas would be bought and inhabited by me, gave a bright edge to laziness. 'A swimming-pool, just here, don't you think?' 'Hammocks under these trees, with the view beyond, what Heaven!' 'One could always eat outside, in this corner.' 'A rose-garden here?' 'No, no, a smooth lawn, with perhaps a border.' We kept away from all utilitarian projects: it

was all a Boccaccio dream: Boccaccio fled from the plague, we were fleeing from a world gone mad. The villas themselves, elegant, gaunt and bare, had need of some utilitarian thought: they offered vaulted ceilings of great beauty, spacious rooms irradiated by sunshine, and a scarcity of drains. But drains were no part of a day-dream.

In due course, as was inevitable, the number of desirable villas was narrowed down. I had no serious intention to buy any, but circumstances were pushing me in that direction. There was Broncigliano, perched on a spur to the south of Florence, above Scandicci: a tall narrow house of baroque and yet faintly ecclesiastical charm. It had a garden which sloped slightly upwards from the house, so that the pattern of box and cypress was spread out like some ancient coloured map: on its façade was a very decorative sundial, with a nostalgic inscription which I have forgotten. It was in perfect order: the owner, intending to marry, had spent much money on it and had installed, among other wonders, bathrooms with seemed suitable to Marie-Antoinette. Then his fiancée had suddenly died: and he had never come near the place again. It had a wistful melancholy: here one could dream life away in a romantic haze. But it had little land, and I thought (how wrongly) that I needed a lot: and, like all Italian houses of its period, it was bereft of corridors: the rooms led one into another: Italians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries must have cared little about the privacy of bedrooms. I had a weakness for Broncigliano, but it was not a practical proposition: later, and perhaps suitably, it became a convent. Then there was Montebello, which belonged to Prince Potenziani. Montebello was a squat toad of a house, superly situated on the top of a hill, with its own land sloping away from it on all sides. It had four different entrances of different periods, and three secret staircases leading to nowhere. It was a mediaeval mess of a house, with great charm. The views were splendid. It was approached by a road so narrow and tortuous that the Rolls could only just negotiate it at a walking pace, not without considerable danger to wings. I was enamoured of Montebello, and rather regret it: but Prince Potenziani wanted more money than I could spend. And then there was the Villa Savonarola, above Pian dei Giullari. This had a mouth-watering garden, full of ancient cypresses, huge wistarias, planes, sycamores, chestnuts, paulonias and catalpas. The house itself, graceful enough outside, was a mess within: mesmerised by the garden, I employed a German architect, at terrifying expense,

to plan a new lay-out of the rooms, which he did very effectively. I became very nearly committed to the Savonarola: in fact, when I eventually decided not to buy it, I think that the owner might well have sued me. But I did not buy it. Over and very much above these three was the famous villa of La Gamberaia. This was in an altogether different category. It is one of the most famous villas of Florence and it is said to have been built by San Gallo. Its view over Florence and the surrounding country is unmatched. Princess Ghika, who had owned it, had renovated and replanned the exquisite gardens with immense taste and ability. Water from the hills above flowed down to it in abundance, and the water-gardens and fountains could have had a glitter almost like that of the Villa d'Este. The Germans, during the war, had used the house as a map store: when the Allies approached, they burnt it to the ground: only the outside walls were left standing, with a mass of rubble within. This could be bought for £15,000, and would have cost quite as much again to put in order: this meant that I should have to sink pretty well the whole of my capital in it – both risky and difficult. The gamble, however, had certain advantages: there were some two hundred acres of land, and the annual income from olive oil alone was around £1,500: again, since the house was listed as a National Monument and was of rare beauty, it would probably always find a purchaser. Bernard Berenson, to whom I listened always with affection and respect, urged me to buy it. 'A fine life's work for you, Lionel.' I did not much care for that word work. Nor did I see myself, after shedding all my capital, living in the Gamberaia exclusively on the products of its acres. Perhaps my caution was wrong: old men should be explorers. Today, as I write, it has been bought, and is in process of renovation by some immensely wealthy industrialists, and doubtless they will live in it with the splendour which it merits. Beautiful Gamberaia! You must be a commercial plunderer to own such houses today: and perhaps that is true in all ages. Good luck to the commercial plunderers who keep such houses going! I like them much better than dreary curators, leading gaping tourists through lifeless rooms.

Sunlit dreams, however vague, have to be accompanied by people and money. In 1946 the money problem was acute. I have (as I hope that this narrative makes clear) no sense of money. I cannot imagine where it is and what it does, though I love spending it. I had lived quite happily in Italy since 1943, and it did not occur to me, believe it or not, that after the end of a glorious

war, and with £40,000, I could not live in it again. The British Treasury had other ideas. I had not got around to those. I simply asked my bank in London what I should do about money, and my bank manager (a rather stupid fellow just then) replied that I should inform him as soon as I had 'taken up residence' in Italy – whatever that might mean – and he would then take the necessary steps to supply me. I duly wrote that I was established in Florence, but no money came. I borrowed right and left, and wrote exasperated letters to the bank. Eventually they replied that they were 'taking the necessary steps with the Bank of England'. This was Greek to me, and I was not in a cautious mood. It seemed natural enough to discuss my problem with a friendly Director of the Swiss Bank. I was at that time blissfully unaware of that new-born monster, Exchange Control. That, in the context of our regimented times, may sound silly: yet why, in the piping peace time of victorious nations, and with the Four Freedoms blaring from every bank note, should one suppose that freedom to spend one's own money was denied? Mr Sweitzer of the Swiss Bank was not only helpful but enthusiastic. I had only to write a cheque. For how much? he asked. I said blithely that I thought £10,000 would do. I wrote the cheque, and the equivalent of £10,000 in lire was handed over to me. It all seemed very straightforward and simple. I now had enough money to buy, not La Gamberaia, but at any rate some sort of villa. The dream could continue.

Among people, Bernard Berenson ranked first. He was about eighty-two at this time, and was generally dubbed 'the uncrowned King of Florence'. Much has been, and doubtless will be, written about him: his achievements do not need to be chronicled here. What chiefly struck me about him was that here was that rarest of creatures – a man who had done exactly what pleased him in an unexplored field of learning, had lived a marvellous and glittering life among the things that he loved, and yet, starting from nothing, had made not only an enormous personal success but also an enormous financial one. Yet, if one writes that down, his quality still escapes words. The same thing might be said of a Beaverbrook or a Bottomley. The odd thing about BB was that he had made culture *pay*. His villa, I Tatti, was not only a shrine for beautiful things, and for a colossal library: it also had a garden which, laid out by him fifty years earlier, seemed pure fourteenth century. Moreover, I Tatti was a magnet for distinguished people from the whole (alleged) Free World, from the

King of Sweden to Walter Lippman and Kenneth Clark (or vice versa, if you prefer a different order.) It was a kind of club on which fresh and interesting personalities were always converging. For some reason, maybe *faute de mieux*, BB took a fancy to me at this time, and insisted that I should take him out alone in the Rolls. I was a little frightened of this responsibility, and much more frightened by BB himself who, perhaps because he had never driven a car, thought that any car could go anywhere. In quest of some forgotten shrine or church – or even, on one occasion, a pine tree with enormous spreading roots – he would urge me along precipitous tracks and over matchstick bridges: and, if I complained, would say: 'Go on, go on, what is the matter with you?' But he knew Italy like, as they say, the back of his hand, was a mine of information, and a witty companion whose age did not matter at all. I loved his company.

Elle Milani, whom I had first met at a window on the Lungarno, was a very different pair of shoes. She had the knack or craze or irritating habit (however you like to look at it) of dramatizing everything. A butterfly on a rose, a lizard on a wall, a plate of spaghetti, a drifting cloud, a hurrying ant, a tree in blossom, the smoke of a passing train, a handsome *contadino*, a spider's web – from anything and everything spouted a twinkling flood of superlatives. She rejoiced in life. You could not call her a gushing woman, for everything was deeply felt – deeply felt for about five seconds. She flitted across life like a bee, taking honey from this flower and that. (She still does.) All one's defences were downed by this spate of enthusiasm. In the end, it could be tiresome. But rather *malgré moi*, she constituted herself my bear-leader, and I was too feeble to escape. She would telephone to me every morning at eight sharp: 'Not up Yet?' 'No, I am Not.' 'But such a lovely morning to be in bed?' 'I like bed.' 'And did you sleep well?' 'No, I didn't.' 'You had dreams?' 'Yes, I had.' 'What about?' 'I dunno, perhaps water.' 'No! but how Wonderful! I dreamt of water too!' 'Oh, for God's sake!' 'Yes, but doesn't it mean that we should go to the sea today? And bathe, perhaps?' 'Don't want to go to the sea.' 'Oh, but think how lovely, the sparkling waves . . .' To be cross with this was as futile as anger with a bit of mercury which refuses to go into the hole in the puzzle: sometimes one might want to hurl the puzzle at the wall, but in the end one came back to it and tried again.

If Elle positively gave off sparks, her son Micci was, perhaps inevitably, negative. He had to be, for they were seldom apart.

Micci seemed hardly to be there at all. Not that he was in any way peculiar: he looked nice, behaved well, talked sensibly, and was unfailingly good-tempered. But he somehow failed to register: one forgot he was there. I never knew him well, and I don't think anyone did. Sometimes I vaguely wondered if his still waters ran deep: sometimes I thought there was no water at all. Eventually he was destined to surprise us all by suicide. These two certainly banished loneliness and solitude and even privacy as far as I was concerned: they adopted me like a new baby, and sometimes the baby wanted to scream in its cradle. I have never been able to enjoy the close proximity of human beings, however charming, for too long a stretch. Nicky Mariano, the mistress of I Tatti (whose adorable grace, intelligence and beauty I can't even endeavour to pin down with words) once said, laughing, that I resembled the man in the Arabian nights who each evening went down to the caravanserai, invited and entertained a guest chosen at random, and in the morning said 'Good-bye, God-speed, and I hope we never meet again.' It was an observation which came near the truth.

One evening, returning from some foray in the Rolls, I said – unguardedly – that I should buy the Savonarola. Elle at once frothed up in a soufflé of excitement. 'How wonderful,' she exclaimed, 'to think that *we* found it for you!' I flew into a rage: pettishly I swore to myself that I would never inhabit a house which someone else would always claim to have discovered for me. The Fates decreed that next morning, the Countess Pecori-Giraldi, a woman who dabbled in estates and houses, telephoned to me to say that she had seen a house which might suit me. In anti-Savonarola mood, I agreed to go and see it at once. She arrived in an ancient car with two dubious individuals whom I took to be middlemen. We drove to a part of the country, north of Florence, which I had not seen before. When we came to a huge bare-looking house, with an unkempt lawn and great doors from which all paint had peeled, I said at once that it was no good at all, and I did not even want to go inside it. While I was turning away, the great doors were slowly opened by a tiny woman who seemed to have stepped straight from the Middle Ages. Beyond them the sunshine fell on a vast courtyard, surrounded by a shady cloister of delicate soaring arches. It had a stunning quality of peace and beauty, and was entirely unexpected. I stepped in, and saw beyond the cloister a small but exquisitely made doorway. Beyond it again was a formal rosegarden, some thirty-five yards

square, bounded by ancient box hedges and grey walls: and this garden seemed to hang suspended above a view of Tuscany, stretching away to the Chianti hills, so romantic, so perfectly arranged, so peaceful, that it seemed unreal. Inside the house, bare as a barracks, were great rooms whose vaulting floated up like clouds, or drifting white smoke, so light it was. Eight huge sitting-rooms, twelve bedrooms, a colossal granary, and one extremely ancient and probably unworkable bathroom. This house I had to have. I asked the middlemen the price. 'Twelve millions.' Too much for me: far, far too much. I said that I would offer the owners five (at that time about £4,000) if I had the reply by the next morning, because (as was true enough) I was already more than half committed to another villa. The reply next morning was in the affirmative. Thus, in a freakish moment, I acquired the idiotically large house, with some fifty acres and three farms, known as Le Tavernule. Oddly enough, my snap decision was right not only aesthetically, but also financially. I lived in it and loved it for six years, and I still think it one of the most beautiful houses in the world. When I had to sell it, which was inevitable with my comparatively slender means, it fell, luckily, into good hands, and is beautifully tended today.

The rescue and redesigning of old houses is a game which attracts some people and frightens others. I have always found it one of the most entrancing, and in every way rewarding, occupations imaginable. Some eight transactions of this kind have fallen to my lot, and each one has been not only a delight, but also a successful financial gamble. People are, as a rule, oddly unimaginative about houses, and, as every architect and interior decorator knows, will pay large sums for designs and alterations which cost little. I am, however, somewhat allergic to architects and interior decorators as tribes. Merely to design a house in which you are not going to live, merely to dress up a room in current taste – these are not enough. You must first believe in a house, then alter and decorate it to suit yourself and nobody else, and then live in it for at least a year, so that you can iron out all its inconveniences and failures. After that you may have something to sell which will please any purchaser. Every house that I have ever sold has pleased its purchaser, and, what is more, in nearly every case the purchaser is still in possession, and happy to be. And, besides having myself lived in these houses for a total span of some fifteen years all told, I have made (and, needless to say, long ago spent) about £15,000 profit from their sales. Nature

did not endow me with many talents, but this quirk of ability with houses is something in which I have come to believe: I am fairly confident that, if I outlive my capital, as seems horribly possible now, I could still make a steady thousand pounds a year by the manipulation of houses. Not a fortune, but still enough. And, in case you think that I am bragging, I will add that you can't do this kind of thing without some capital to start with – and therefore perhaps heaps of people without capital could do it just as well as I – and also that it can be described as a sort of confidence trick, because you are using ignorance to boost appearances. Still – that could be said of every advertiser in the world.

The pleasure of playing with houses is usually, in my experience, in inverse ratio to their size. Some people, I daresay, would be thrilled by the job of doing up Buckingham Palace or Chatsworth or Windsor Castle – not I. Acres of walls and floors cannot be treated with affection. The real fun is to be had out of an old barn, or a couple of ruined cottages, with an acre or two of garden. Multiplication cancels love, in all walks of life.

Le Tavernule was, as I was uneasily (though only at times) aware, a very risky proposition. In 1946 large houses were white elephants, and no one could tell whether the wealthy international life of Florence would ever be revived. The house was not obviously attractive, appearing at first sight a box-like fortress of a place, formidably austere in its neglected gardens. It had neither drains nor light nor power nor – as I discovered too late – water. It was a good six miles – too far for rich snobs – from Florence. Its only approach, for the last mile and a half, was a very narrow, dusty, and frightfully bumpy track which, whatever you might do to it, was immediately ruined by ox-carts. Against these unsaleable factors there was the position of the house, which was superb: every window in it commanded a wide and lovely view over the unspoiled Chianti country. There was the cloistered quadrangle, and the hanging garden beyond it. There was complete silence – for those who liked it. (Quite often my visitors would remark, with a haunted expression: 'It's very quiet here!' – and, God knows, most of us are now unaccustomed to silence.) There was also the fact, which to me seemed important, that this house, alone of all those that I had seen, had never been renovated or let to a foreigner, and was in perfect fifteenth century condition. It had a long and well-authenticated history of occupation by one Italian family for three centuries: the old documents still preserved showed that they had been an eccle-

siastical lot, very careful of their farm accounts, but giving largely and regularly to hospitals and convents. The little chapel contained their tombs, with some touching references to 'these blessed solitudes' (*questi cari silenzi*). The whole place had a great feeling of peace: I felt that the ghosts, if any, were extremely benign. And the fifty acres were very fertile, giving a considerable yield of corn, wine, and oil. I made up my mind (and this is very necessary if you are going to renovate a house successfully) that I would live in Le Tavernule for the rest of my natural life. That dream, real enough at the time, was shattered eventually by the Inland Revenue and the necessity to buy atom bombs to protect Britain which I never wanted to see again. Thus are we victimised by the places of our birth. However, if my great-grandfather had not made a fortune from cotton, I could not have bought Le Tavernule: so perhaps it was quite just that I should lose it again in order to pay money to the wealthy working-classes of Britain. All the same, I rather resent being done in the eye by power-seeking politicians.

A nice financial mess was in fact in the making, even if it was temporarily obscured by my ignorance and by the immediate distractions of the job. A quarter of my resources had been transferred to Italy, and although ten thousand pounds was a large enough sum to me, it was not sufficient to cope with the purchase and renovation of a down-at-heel mansion of some twenty-five large rooms. That it was done at all was due partly to the then high value of the pound (before Cripps had devalued it), and partly to the low cost of Italian labour in 1946. Another and not unimportant factor was that foreign visitors had not yet begun to return to Italy, and shops were anxious to sell, even at low prices. Servants could be had for the equivalent of one pound a month, and labour was correspondingly cheap. Started six months earlier, the job might have been completed within ten thousand pounds. As it was, between the purchase in August 1946 and the partial but necessarily final conclusion of work about a year later, all prices were multiplied, more or less, by ten. Estimates, carefully made, became comic scraps of paper overnight, each week the household bills climbed to dizzy heights: prices of furniture – and even haggling about them – became impossible. By the time that Sir Stafford Cripps had cut off a quarter of my income, I was already in no position to maintain Le Tavernule. In spite of all that I had, for the first eighteen months, a splendid spendthrift time.

Water provided the first and worst crisis. The house had been bought on the spur of the moment, without any surveying advice: and it was lucky that the roofs and structure were in stout good order. But I had accepted all too lightly the owners' assertion that the ancient well in the courtyard, ninety feet deep, was inexhaustible. The water in it was about ten feet deep and produced, with luck, one bath per day. That seemed strange, though perhaps washing had never played a great part in the history of Le Tavernule. The idea of digging it deeper was opposed on the grounds that, if it had ever been inexhaustible, the earthquake of 1896 had probably diverted the underground source, which would not be easy to rediscover. At this point Signor Peruzzi, very fortunately for me, entered my life. He was a builder in a large way, and President of the Builders Trade Union. He must have been getting on for seventy, but every day, in blazing sun or drenching rain, he walked up the steep hill to the villa, and radiated energy, charm, and commonsense. Once, when I asked him how, at his age, he could be so active, he replied: 'No Tea, no Coffee, no Alcohol, no Tobacco.' Signor Peruzzi said that if I really wanted five new bathrooms (and I did) I must sink another well. But where? A number of water-diviners were summoned, ranging from a charming old priest who had been water-diviner to the Italian Army to a tight-lipped young man with a box of coloured chemicals from a firm in Milan. They all gave their widely-differing advice, and there seemed to be no reason to believe any of them. To sink a well at great expense, and then to find no water, was an unpleasant idea. But without water, all my plans would be futile: one might go without baths, but without water one could not begin to make a garden. Eventually I discovered that the *contadini* grew their occasional vegetables in a place which was, by common and ancient consent, the least dry on the estate: and it seemed best to experiment there. So, under Peruzzi's direction, a well eight feet in diameter was begun: and, as always, I admired the ability, tenacity and gaiety of Italian workers. At six feet below the surface we struck rock, and I could hardly believe that manual labour would get through it. At twelve feet water began to come in, at twenty there was a promising flow, but at thirty-five it had not increased and Peruzzi advised me to stop. It was not quite what I had hoped for. It was enough to supply the house, and, moderately, the garden: but it wasn't enough for rain-sprays for the lawn or a swimming pool, both of which were then among my crazy ideas. The well

was 400 yards from the house and eighty feet below it: a major trench-digging operation, and a huge expenditure on pipes, to say nothing of an automatic electric pump, were required to get the water up. When it first gushed out in the house I was thrilled: my thrill was chilled by my three tenant-farmers, who asked at once whether I was not going to pipe it to their houses. I wasn't and I couldn't afford to do so: but I felt guilty.

The garden was now going ahead. I planted three thousand roses, and, after dragging out twelve old trees with the help of oxen, laid out a lawn some seventy by thirty yards. Both these bits of work were idiotic: to look after 3,000 roses and a huge lawn without a gardener (which I couldn't afford) was an impossible task, and it kept me in a flurry for the rest of my time at Le Tavernule. But, since I never did enough, the roses got worse and worse, and the lawn, as lawns do in Italy unless they are flooded on every summer day, wilted away. To the inexperienced eye, the garden went on flourishing for some considerable time: to my own it rapidly became an unconquerable tangle of weeds. I don't know that I ever really enjoyed it: it represented TOO MUCH WORK. Too late I realized that the real Florentines

who kept their gardens to cypress hedges, statues, and very few flowers were much wiser than I was. When you live in Italy, and actually try to cultivate a garden yourself, you soon realize why English people garden so much and so successfully – because it is easy. Tuscan soil and Tuscan summers are guaranteed to drive any English gardener demented: the earth becomes rock, and you can never water it enough: English (or adopted English) flowers such as delphinium, phlox, and lupins – indeed all flowers that love moisture – die on you persistently. The English gardener in Italy has to learn a new vocabulary – tuberose, camellias, hydrangea, and such creepers as wisteria, bignonia, and the Cambridge-blue plumbago. A very good vocabulary it can be, but gardening habits are difficult to unlearn. For years I continued to try to cultivate flowers unsuited to Tuscany.

Inside the house I installed my five bathrooms and gradually collected, at reasonable prices, some excellent furniture. I also had to buy beds and mattresses and curtains and sofas and upholstered chairs – an expense which I resented, because such things do not last. In England, when my *folie de grandeur* had not grown so large, I had stored some 4,000 books (which had been with me to India and back) and enough furniture for one bedroom and sitting-room, which I had thought would be about

my mark. But to have these sent to Italy was, in 1947, extremely difficult. The Board of Trade required a permit, and that could only be obtained after they had scanned – and altered – a detailed list. No silver or jewels of course: in fact nothing saleable, because if I were to sell things I might defeat Treasury regulations about my income. They took a poor view even of my books – did I intend to set up a shop? I wanted my books very much, and made a howl about them: I told my solicitors (who were much too grand for me) to badger the Board. Eventually and after a considerable time, the Board gave way, and my solicitors, who had some *folie de grandeur* too, immediately took a complete railway van, and sent my few possessions across Europe. The whole van, perched on a road chassis, duly arrived at Le Tavernule, and knocked down five olive trees and a cypress in its progress up the drive. The bill was £450.

This rake's progress was neatly punctured by a letter from the Bank of England. I was asked to explain why I was trying to buy ten thousand pounds worth of textiles in England. By this time I had come to understand, vaguely, the pains and penalties attached to Exchange Control, and though I still did not understand why I could not spend my own money, I realized that I might have committed a dire offence. I broke into a cold sweat. I had read in the newspapers some of the proceedings taken by Exchange Control against those who got their money out by illicit means, and I now saw myself fined £50,000 and utterly ruined – which was indeed a possibility. I went to the Swiss Bank and asked what had been done with my cheque: they said that it had been sold to a third party, whose name they could not divulge. I wrote a humble letter to the Bank of England, saying exactly what I had done, and suggesting that I could now probably sell the house and return the money (my money) to England. I wrote to my friend Patrick Baggallay, a leading light in the City, who knew all about the transaction, asking him to advise me. The Bank replied tersely that the sale of my house would serve no useful purpose, but that my £10,000 cheque would not, of course, be honoured. Patrick wrote in high glee, saying that the cheque had been presented by an Italian industrialist to a Bradford wool firm, that they had sent it for collection to the Bank of England, that the bank had returned it marked RD, that the Bradford firm had indignantly sent it to him, and that he had immediately burnt it. 'There is, so far as I can see,' he added, 'no written record of this transaction, and

your Italian cannot proceed against you, because he has broken his own country's laws. You have therefore got £10,000 for nothing.' That was all very well as a joke: but the fact remained that I had a debt of £10,000 which I could not repay, and that the Bank of England would not view my antics with any pleasure. Worse still, I had spent £12,000 on Le Tavernule: and how could I now ever hope to get the £2,000 which I owed? From this time onwards my scribbled diaries, which had been extremely gay, become peppered with the ominous phrase; 'Must sell this house at once.'

It was a hideous idea, because Le Tavernule was a unique and exquisite house, and, although I had not been able to furnish it more than sparsely – perhaps a mistake on the right side – was comfortable enough. Life on the outskirts of Florence had become very pleasant: there was a small group of friendly and amusing people with houses in the neighbourhood, and the rather casual social life gave a perfect mixture of occasional parties and solitude. And I clung obstinately to the notion that, with the world at peace, everything would improve. But in the meantime (as is not uncommon in these days) money became a Maddening Misery, and soon I could think of nothing else. Into this persistent nightmare stepped a rich Italian industrialist. He was brought up to the villa one day, and I was impressed by this tall grave gentleman who – so I was told – had had all his property confiscated by Mussolini and had been sent to the Lipari Islands: but had since managed to make a huge fortune all over again. He asked if he could be of any assistance to me, and said that he was making, in collaboration with an Englishman, an Anglo-Italian film which would be highly profitable and that if I cared to invest in it, he would be able to pay me my profits in Italian lire. He told me all about the film, which was to be called *Children of Light*, and shot at Ischia. I thought that the story was an excellent one: moreover, the film was heavily backed by the National Provincial Bank and also by the Film Finance Corporation. I met the partner, who seemed agreeable, if vague. Without further ado, I invested £7,000 in him, in England: and received an advance of £1,000 in Italian money, which enabled me to pay some debts. The rest, £6,000, went down the drain and was never heard of again. Despite all my efforts, I have never to this day discovered what happened to the film, or whether it was ever shown. This put *finis* to Le Tavernule. I had spent £11,000

and lost another £6,000. A fool and his money, you may rightly say, are soon parted. But wait.

It is odd to reflect that, in this story, money takes a more and more important place. At the beginning, when there was little of it, it scarcely mattered: in retrospect the moneyless days seem to have been the best. When it was earned it was carelessly spent: it seemed possible and natural to be able to earn more. Even when the power was temporarily lost, the resulting squeeze was of no great concern. But from the moment that money was inherited, it turned into an anxiety. It came like a spectre at night to the bedside, clawing at the mind: it produced an allergy to any visits to the bank ('how much is there in my current account?'); it made all bills a threat, and a menace: it threw 'a cloud across the future. Yet two simple remedies always existed. If you haven't enough, earn more. Alternatively, if you have £1,000 a year, live on £800. But it is a quirk of conventionalized human nature that the man with private means, while not necessarily shirking activity or 'work', will try to avoid being bossed about. Again, a man brought up in a certain circle and with friends of a certain way of life, will attempt, whether he can afford it or not, to keep to that circle and that way of life. He will keep up with the Joneses. It may be, indeed it is, stupid: but it is as insidious a habit as smoking and quite as difficult to break. In *The Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler wrote: '*Money losses are the hardest to bear of any by those who are old enough to comprehend them. A man can stand being told that he must submit to a severe surgical operation, or that he has some disease which will shortly kill him, or that he will be a cripple or blind for the rest of his life: dreadful as such tidings must be, we do not find that they unnerve the greater number of mankind . . . Loss of money indeed is not only the worst pain in itself, but it is the parent of all others. Let a man have been brought up to a moderate competence, and have no speciality: then let his money be suddenly taken from him, and how long is his health likely to survive the change in all his little ways which loss of money will entail? How long again is the esteem and sympathy of friends likely to survive him?*' People today may not agree with Butler's opinions, and Chancellors of the Exchequer do not subscribe to it: in my own case it seemed menacing enough.

So, in 1948, I put Le Tavernule in the hands of agents. Many wealthy and distinguished people, including the ex-Queen of Bulgaria and the Duchess of Aosta, came to see it, and I develop-

ed a line of patter. But none of them came near buying it. There was no disguising the facts that the approach was bad enough to ruin any car, and that there was neither central heating nor telephone. After a while I became convinced that I should never sell it: and saw myself retiring servantless to live in the kitchen, and allowing the rest of the house to fall down around me. And that, indeed, was one way out of my troubles, and might have been imposed on me. I am not even sure that it would have been particularly unpleasant. But such is the weakness or vanity of human nature that I should have flinched at that confession of poverty.

I had by this time discovered a legal method of repaying £10,000 to my Italian industrialist, and discharging the debt. So I was now £17,000 out of pocket, with some debts still hanging over me.

One day two charming friends of mine, Walter and Lenore Lucas, asked me if I would care to drive over to Lucca with them, to see a small house which they might buy. When we arrived, I was surprised to find myself in front of a villa which I had frequently and greatly admired from the road below. It was beautifully perched on a spur in an isolated valley, with blue mountains rising sharply behind it: the architecture, though unpretentious, had that special Italian harmony of line and colour which seems to make a house grow naturally from its environment: best of all, it was surrounded – and this is rare in Italy – by thick woods of acacia, oak, lime and sycamore. Inside, it had great charm: a spacious hall, one large sitting-room, and four bedrooms. It also had four bathrooms and central heating. It was in a bad state of repair, because bombs and shells had narrowly missed it: but, compared with Le Tavernule, renovation was child's play. I had an immediate yen for it: but, since it was the Lucas's discovery, my hands were tied. In any case, I could hardly flirt with a new house until or unless I sold Le Tavernule. All the same, I did flirt with the idea. And sometimes ideas, if well flirted-with, are realized.

At this time I was still painting. Painting, however poor the talent, is the most wonderful occupation in the world for anyone who has worries. Take your box and your easel and your canvas, and you are lost to all else while the light lasts. I found it an unbeatable remedy for anxiety. I am far from a talented painter, but I had done just enough work to make myself capable of building up a passable picture: and I never failed to convince myself (for the first hour at least) that this was going to be the

best thing I had ever done. The result, of course and inevitably, was a horrid disappointment. Nevertheless painting, however badly done, alerts the eye and widens the appreciation of colour and line. But I now felt that it was not enough, and decided to take up music. I bought a Bechstein (the rake's progress was still in full spate) and vamped on it. I had never possessed a piano before, and my father's horror had so influenced me that I had never dared to play on one: so I made some nasty noises, conscious always of my father's ghost near by. I decided that a teacher was necessary. There was in Florence a certain Signor Reali, a musician who seemed engaging and sympathetic: I went to call on him. The maid who answered my ring said: 'Signor Reali died yesterday.' A little daunted by this contretemps, I asked Nicky Mariano, who was an excellent musician, if she could recommend anybody to teach the piano to a fifty-two-year-old. After some thought, she chose Professor X. I went to call on Professor X. The maid who answered my ring said: 'Professor X died this morning.' I concluded that either God or my father did not wish me to have a teacher: and went on vamping.

Presently the Lucases announced that they could not afford the house at Lucca. I at once wrote to the owner, explaining my position and saying that I would buy the house if and when Le Tavernule was sold, but could not do so before. I did not have much hope about this, because owners who wish to sell are not usually inclined to wait, and I knew that Countess Pecori-Giraldi was already angling for the house. But in this case the owner, Lady Norah Smith, was an unusual person. She replied with a most engaging and witty letter, saying that the suitability of the owner was more important to her than the price or date of sale, and was I suitable? She had met my sister, and thought that I might be. I answered, of course, that my suitability was supreme, but that she might have to wait for ten years or so. From this exchange of letters a pen friendship developed rapidly, and blossomed into affection when, later, I met Norah in London. Very soon she was sold on the idea that I alone should have the house: and refused all other offers. I was both delighted and embarrassed, since there still seemed little hope of selling Le Tavernule.

English people who have houses in Italy are (or certainly during the forties and fifties were) subjected to heavy pressure by English visitors. After I had been at Le Tavernule for two

or three years, scarcely a day passed without some missive of this kind – ‘Perhaps you may remember Mrs Willoughby, whose sister-in-law told me that you very kindly invited her brother to tea last year. Mrs Willoughby urged us to write to you when we were in Florence. Of course, we do not wish to disturb you, but . . .’ Even though one didn’t remember any Mrs Willoughby or a sister-in-law or a brother, *noblesse oblige* (or a desire to show off) held firm: down one went in the car to Florence: call at the hotel: ‘perhaps you’d care to come up to lunch the day after tomorrow?’ ‘Yes, indeed, how kind . . .’ Down with the car again, because they’re far too silly to find their way by tram, and travelling allowances don’t permit taxis: and up to the villa: and a dreary lunch, and you never want to see them again: back to Florence with them: and, totted up, a considerable expense. Elynth Capponi, one of the most enchanting women in Florence, told me, when I spoke to her about this constant intrusion, that she put all such letters straight into the waste paper basket. ‘They can think,’ she said, ‘that I’m dead: I simply can’t afford to entertain them.’ Nor could I: but I did.

One summer evening at about eight o’clock, when I had a bevy of these strangers sitting in the courtyard, drinking cock-tails and waiting for dinner, a huge green Cadillac drew up at the door. In it were three elegantly dressed people, who introduced themselves as Mr and Mrs James C. Smoot and Mrs Boehm. They wished to see the villa. Browned off by phoney purchasers, I said curtly that it was too late. They protested that they had driven from Montecatini with the sole idea of seeing Le Tavegnule. I offered them five minutes, saying that my guests were waiting. They were rushed through the house, and I forgot my patter, which perhaps was a good thing. Emerging with her *pekingese*, Mrs Smoot threw me a smile and said: ‘We are vurry interested in this villa.’ I did not believe it. But next morning an agent arrived to say that the Smoots wished to buy the villa immediately, *with all its contents*, and what would be the price? I was staggered. I had never dreamed of selling the whole thing as it stood. They wanted an instant answer. Needs must when the devil drives: I could not turn down any offer. I said, a hundred thousand dollars. The agent said that he thought that they would consider that quite reasonable. They did: and next day came to lunch. I said to Mrs Smoot: ‘But surely you don’t want all these dusty old books?’ ‘Oh, yes, I do.’ ‘The Bechstein?’ ‘Oh, yes.’ ‘These bits of white

china?' 'Yes, yes.' I nearly asked: 'My grandmother's photograph?' and felt sure that, if I had, the answer would have been yes. When they departed, I put my head in my hands. A hundred thousand dollars was something, but could I be stripped naked of every possession? Obviously I must be.

Fortunately the Smoots had second thoughts. They asked me to lunch on the following day, and Mrs Smoot confided to me that Mr Smoot had another 'proposition' to make. (My heart fell). They had, said Mrs Smoot—who was an elegant and charming woman—several houses already, and Mr Smoot (who remained for the most part silent) did not care to commit himself too far in Yurup till the Russian problem was solved. So they would like to take my villa for two years, paying me five hundred dollars a month (in advance). I was to continue living in it, and they would maybe come over. At the end of two years, either they would buy it, in which case the rent would be deducted from the price, or they would not, and I should retain the rent. It sounded utterly crazy to me and I said so. I even heard myself arguing against it. But nothing would deflect them. In the afternoon we went to a notary, and the agreement was drawn up and signed. After that, Mr Smoot (I felt that I must be dreaming) paid twelve thousand dollars into my bank. And I never saw, or (personally) heard from them again. They vanished into America and never returned. I have been told that they divorced: I don't know. All I know is that I got twelve thousand dollars that afternoon. And I remain grateful to the Smoots. This story sounds incredible, but it is perfectly true.

With twelve thousand dollars I was, at least for the moment, in clover again. I paid debts and bought Larv Norah's house, for which she asked an absurdly small sum. And very quickly I moved over to Lucca, leaving a maid and the caretakers at Le Tavernule. This was consistent with my agreement with the Smoots, since I left Le Tavernule and its furniture intact and well maintained. I wrote to the Smoots suggesting that they could easily let it, if they did not themselves want it: I felt somewhat guilty about them. And they did eventually let it to a charming couple called (in this sequence strange names pursued me) Mr and Mrs Humphrey Mudd. Meantime I went into stark but carefree residence at Lucca, and started another orgy of reconstruction. And this time I had a house which, although far too isolated to be a business proposition, enchanted me as no other house has ever done. It still does, and, by the skin of my teeth

and a vulnerable skin at that, I am still in it. How long I shall remain probably depends on the number of people who read this book.

I must now go back a little. Early in the winter, before the Smoots arrived, I went out one morning and found Lady Berkeley surveying the garden. Molly Berkeley is an engaging and unpredictable person. I asked her what on earth she was doing there. She replied that she had decided to rent my house for the winter. I said that I never let my houses. She was used to having her own way, and offered me a fairly large sum of money. But, poor as I was, the idea did not attract me: in these days, if you are going to be turned out of your own house, you need a colossal sum of money to make up the loss and live comfortably elsewhere. And if you ask, as well you may, what I mean by living comfortably, I mean at least ten pounds a day. If you have not got that, you are better off in your own burrow, with your own books and your own servants. So I did not care for Molly Berkeley's idea. But Molly was not to be beaten. She kept on appearing. Since she had a huge house in Assisi, and another in Rome, I couldn't (and cannot now) imagine what she wanted with Le Tavernule. But she wore me down. At last, one day, she arrived from Assisi in pouring rain, and I said: 'Look how dreary it is: you'd never stand it' – and she produced 500 dollars from her purse. It happened that I had just then been invited to attend the inauguration of the Indian Republic in Delhi. I took the dollars and bought an air ticket. A week later I was in Karachi.

In Karachi Zulfaqr, now Director-General of Radio in Pakistan, gave me a tremendous welcome. Almost instantly he arranged a party of a hundred people, which went on all night. Afterwards I retired to bed with the most thundering attack of malaria I have ever had: and this was very odd, because it was winter, when malaria does not usually occur, and I had never had it since leaving India ten years before. Zulfuqar sat on me while I rattled with fever, and his wife Inayat came and waved cooked crows over my head, to avert the evil eye. The doctors were puzzled by my continuing fever. Eventually I was bundled in blankets to a radiologist, who found, quite correctly, that both lungs were affected by tuberculosis. I was advised to return to England. But, having got so far, I could not miss Delhi: and I eventually got myself into an aeroplane (road and rail traffic between Pakistan and India did not exist) on the day before the

celebrations. In darkness we dropped down on a Delhi marvelously illuminated. One saw that, however dull the British garden city was on the ground, it was superb as a sparkling map. Next morning I got up early and went with my grandly gilded cards to the Durbar Hall, where I found Nehru and Amrit Kaur alone, fussing over the seating arrangements. They were enchantingly warm and kind, and took my teasing lightly. I asked Nehru what on earth he was doing with a bodyguard, all standing round like statues and dressed up with lances in correct Viceregal fashion. He said, 'You wouldn't want me to put the poor chaps out of work, would you?' I felt inclined to ask him what he thought about all the poor English chaps who had been put out of work by his nationalism: but the reply was too obvious.

The ceremony that followed was an impressive transformation scene. Only a few brief years before, the Durbar Hall had seen the stiff British swearing-in of a British Viceroy, surrounded by the dull rectitudes of British civil servants and their dowdy wives. Now the whole atmosphere was changed: and one of the most striking changes was the multitude of foreign representatives, whom British India had never had, and whose presence one had unconsciously missed. Here they all were now, from all over the world, dressed with brilliant elegance in all the varied attires of mankind. They made a splendid decoration. (One wondered, all the same, how Gandhi would have viewed it.) Among them were some striking personalities, such as Soekarno of Indonesia and his beautiful wife, and the grave and gentle Abdullah of Kashmir, so soon to go to jail. But to me the most striking of all was Rajagopalachari, the retiring Governor-General. He always was my favourite man in India: and still is: and I still receive his wonderful letters. That day, at the end of the long and glittering procession, he shuffled up to the throne in a *dhuti*, clearly indifferent to the whole business, but nevertheless dominating it. I knew that he was leaving for his Madras home next morning, and felt that I must speak to him at all costs: I was told that it was out of the question, and that his every minute was already booked. In the terrifyingly crowded reception which followed the inaugural ceremony, I pushed wildly around, trying to find him, and for a long time failing to do so. When I did, he was surrounded by a chattering crowd. I hovered, discouraged, on the outskirts. But suddenly he saw me, and opened his arms to me. I whispered; 'I *must* talk to you!' He beckoned to an ADC, and said: 'When I go out, see that Fielden comes with me.' And so, when the trum-

pets shrilled and the great doors were thrown open for the retiring Governor-General, I was the only one who followed him. That – though perhaps it was only a boost of my vanity – was a thrilling moment, and compensated for much. I talked to him for an hour, and did not (I hope), like Omar Khayyam, come out by that same door as in I went. There was another (for me) emotional moment. Some twenty people were lunching with Nehru in the garden of his house. Lunch was set out on a buffet, and we helped ourselves (Nehru carefully explaining which food was strictly Indian), and took our plates to five small tables. Nan Pandit said to the assembled company: 'We are taking Lionel Fielden to our table, because, you see, he's an honorary citizen of India.' I was alone with JN, Nan, and Sarojini, Naidu's daughter. I thought it a splendid occasion to get the lowdown on everything. But Nehru wasn't having any of that, and talked throughout lunch about the two baby elephants which he was sending by aeroplane as a gift to the American President.

In spite of all this, and indeed much more, kindness, I found India disappointing and depressing. No doubt it was unreasonable to expect that great changes should have been accomplished in so short a time. But I did, I think, expect a miracle: or at any rate a change as great as that in the Durbar Hall. Yet conditions seemed just as chaotic as they had ever been under the British Raj. The teeming poverty-stricken millions were as daunting, the streets as smelly, the faces as apathetic, the whole way of life as tawdry, as ever before. In the thirties, people like Nehru and Amrit Kaur and Rajaji and Satyamurthi, had often teased me, either directly, or (more often) by implication, for living too luxuriously in poor India. Now, it seemed to me, they were living rather more luxuriously than the British ever did. They gave various explanations. 'We must keep up the prestige of India.' 'This furniture, these silks, are Indian-made: we must support Indian industries.' Of course: quite logical: what had I expected? Well, what had Gandhi expected? Not quite this, surely? Gandhi, I thought, would have the Government living in village huts, dressed in *dhotis*, and would have thought that prestige would accrue nevertheless. Gandhi would have decentralized industry into the villages, and in that he may have been far ahead of his time: for American writers today have argued that it may prove less costly and more efficient to take machines to the worker than to transport the workers to factories. Above all, I was struck by the too towering influence of Nehru: take away this corner-

stone, and maybe the whole house will fall down. Nehru was and is by far the most intelligent and long-sighted politician alive: I don't think that anyone who knows him can doubt that: but what happens to India when he disappears? And India is not yet a country: it is at best an uneasy federation of very different tribes. I have never liked alien occupation, and I still believe that India could be a great stabilizing influence in the world: equally, she could be overrun by Russia or China.

Pakistan was a different problem. Arrogant, provincial, angry but (at any rate in West Pakistan) united. Aesthetically backward, it was tough. Its young nationalism hankered to throw off the English language and English influence; which seemed to me to be a practical mistake. The Pakistanis could be admired but not loved: the Indians could be loved but not admired. Perhaps my thoughts were conditioned by ill-health: I flew off from Karachi in a censorious state of mind. I stopped in Rome, because the flight, like all aeroplane flights nowadays, seemed to me hideously boring, cramped, and dull. If I have got to fly, I want to have a window and see the ground: I don't want to be stuck in a noisy bus at 20,000 feet. That's no way to travel. In Rome Elle Milani met me and whirled me off to the sanctification of some minor Spanish saint in St Peters: I watched Pius XII darting about with vigour, and having a chat in front of the altar with the Spanish Ambassador: and wondered if anything in India was more barbaric and nonsensical. Next day I flew on to London with Cyril Radcliffe and a group of Australian footballers: the Australians got very drunk and rushed up and down the aeroplane: Cyril read Trollope to avoid my arguments about his arrangement of the Indian frontier: and there was dense fog over the Alps, which frightened me considerably. In London I broadcast four talks on India and Pakistan, and wrote some articles for *The New York Times*, at their request. All these seemed to be startlingly successful, and, since the Pakistan Government reprinted my talks in a pamphlet, anyone who is interested can read more than I have put down here. I greatly offended many friends in India: but one is always tempted to offend those whom ~~one~~ one loves: the others matter so much less. The net result was that I said good-bye for ever to the non-glamorous East, and never wanted to see it again: and my articles and broadcasts paid for my journey. The inevitable conclusion seemed to be that black and yellow and brown men's countries are not for the white man, nor – and this is of equal importance – are the white men's coun-

tries for the black or brown or yellow. There may come a time, and one hopes that it will, when all races will be equal, but it is not yet. It is not a question of better or worse. The origins, habits, and thought processes of Asia and Africa are entirely alien to the white man, and all mixtures will provoke explosions. For the moment at least, the best thing we can all do is to mind our own business. British leftwing journals and British leftwing politicians have evolved a myth which makes the white man an eternal tyrant, the black man an eternal slave. They will learn better before long. All men of whatever colour are about equally kind, and equally cruel. But habits and ways of life die hard. To try to impose Christianity or Communism or Democracy on anyone is about as silly as to attempt to explain respectability to a Zulu, or to ask the Archbishop of Canterbury to wear a *dhoti*. Some there are who, by mental and spiritual suppleness, have learnt to walk happily among all nations without losing their own individuality: perhaps they are the Baptists of a new world of understanding and tolerance: but as yet they are few.

Returning to Lucca I started, once again, to spend money like water, convinced as I then was that the Smoots, in spite of their silence, would eventually buy Le Tavernule. But as the months slipped by, and at last only four of their lease remained to run, I lost hope, and asked the agents to put it into the market again. The money nightmare reappeared, now worse than ever before. With two houses on my hands, I was sunk: and the prospects of selling Le Tavernule, now un-lived-in for nearly two years, were far from rosy. But the Gods were still with me. One day a car drove up to the house in Lucca, and out of it stepped a vision of beauty, who introduced herself as the Countess Denise de Perouse de Cars. She was accompanied by a well-known and wealthy Venetian lawyer named Carnelutti. The vision told me, without more ado and with the certainty of a pretty woman, that she *must* have Le Tavernule. I explained that it was still leased to the Smoots, and that its ultimate future depended on them. Nothing daunted, she said that I must there and then sign an agreement that, if the Smoots did not take it, I would sell it to her. I could not get to the table fast enough. It was agreed that she should have it, without furniture, for fifteen thousand pounds: and eventually she did. As soon as I had signed, she went off and was sick in the bathroom: and I reflected then and later (when she had spent colossal sums on Le Tavernule) that I might have stung her

for a good bit more. However, there it was: all in all, Le Tavernule had cost me nothing, and the furniture was sheer profit. Houses have always been lucky for me: or perhaps I have been lucky for houses. Le Tavernule, a ruined barrack in 1946, is now one of the most beautifully kept villas in Tuscany, and although I can't bear to go near it, I am glad that it is happy.

The retreat to Lucca changed my life profoundly. Le Tavernule had had a certain isolation, but it was an isolation with plenty of neighbours a quarter of an hour away. Lucca was altogether different. There were no English people – as far as I ever discovered – for forty miles around; the ancient Italian families, in huge villas which they used only in summer, were of a Victorian stodginess and, after I had attended a few of their formal parties, I concluded that I was as much at sea with them as in, say, Warwickshire. The fifty miles to Florence were just enough to put off the casual lunch or dinner guest, and I also found that to drive there for a meal was an effort rather than a pleasure. Fortunately, friends did still come to stay with me from England and elsewhere: but I was inevitably condemned to a considerable dose of solitude. Whether that is a bad or good thing I don't know: perhaps it is as well, towards the end of one's life, to learn to be self-reliant. If sometimes I rail at solitude, I am still aware that I should much more dislike to live permanently with another human being. And I should be an ungrateful dog if I didn't enjoy life in this enchanting house, with (so it seems to me) one of the most varied and beautiful gardens that it is possible to imagine. What more, in one's middle sixties, can one want? But I do, dammit, want more: I want youth back again. So will you, one of these days.

Notes in November

The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it till I am solitary, and cannot impart it till I am known, and do not want it SAMUEL JOHNSON - LETTER TO LORD CHESTERFIELD

END OF STORY: end, very nearly, of self also. *Tu reclaims le Soir: il descend: le voici* It is oddly unexpected - the backward glance at life vanishing, the forward glance into darkness. Was any of it worth doing, was it even worth living? To me this seems the tale of an irresolute flunkey, as meaningless as a stone dropped into a silent pool. The ripples are gone: they altered nothing.

Anyone who writes a personal story of an undistinguished life risks the label of egocentric bore. And so he may be. Egocentricity, close relative of individuality, is unusually unfashionable today. The emphasis, in our climate of opinion, is placed on the crowd, the mass, the shuffle of gregarious movement. The slogan is objectivity: facts, figures, empires of one sort or another: nothing personal, if you please. The individual, unless closely linked with a party, a fashion, a cause, an ideology, is suspect. The independent candidate is not elected: the small shopkeeper is swallowed by the syndicate: the craftsman is supplanted by the mass production machine: the good politician votes as the Whip directs: the worker obeys his Union. Departures from orthodoxy are considered arrogant. Like piracy, slavery, the application of leeches, a belief in witches, or the regular collapse under the table after two bottles of port, such ideas seem proper enough in their time and place. They are eternal truths but current myths. Governments today are driven to equate a cut-throat national prosperity with human happiness. Industry must turn out shoddy goods as fast as possible. Advertisement flourishes to create a lust for unnecessary possessions. Transport carries people further and faster with less and less purpose. Newspapers must appeal to instincts of greed, envy, luxury and power. Education must extol nationalism. And the object of the exercise is to persuade of dragoon millions of ignorant souls to vote for their own strangu

lation by despotism or by bureaucracy. The dictator, the statesman, the trades unionist, the syndicate, and even the crowd itself, all wish, for their different reasons, to encourage uniformity. Virtue becomes attached to conceptions such as discipline, loyalty, reliability, perseverance, common sense (a dull lot), while a pejorative fungus creeps over such words as rash, queer, wild, impetuous, capricious, sensitive, and even artistic. That is one measure of our climate of opinion. Eccentricity, if permitted at all, must be highly successful. The orderly and prosperous ant-heap is the goal: and, if we score it, we shall have lost the game. The candle, if a candle there was two thousand years ago to light man's way, will be extinguished.

That is a way of putting it: tendentious of course, as all opinions must be. The point of my narrative is the pointlessness which may overtake individuals in certain climates of opinion. Our younger writers, I think, harp on the theme of pointlessness: the angry young men are not complaining of poverty or fear or enslavement: they are complaining of sheer boredom and lack of aim. And this applies also to my portrait. The fellow whom I have tried to describe is a disappointment to me. I find him unexpectedly dull and silly. He has ambled through life with small effect. Most people do: that is no consolation. Must a man go through all the hoops of birth and death and the maddening maintenance of a body for seventy years for no apparent purpose? Or is the purpose merely the *enjoyment* of the seventy years? And, if it is, why do men so consistently deny it to other men? Or is it, Holy Father, no more than a preparation for the abysmal boredom of harps and angels? Heaven, as imagined by man, is oddly repellent and unconvincing: I cannot feel enthusiastic about waking up with wings and a nightgown. Yet that proves nothing: the human brain may be unable to perceive an eternity which it cannot deny: it can, however, perceive the mess on earth, of which I am a part, and you also. No half-century in history can show a more hideous display of massacre, torture, regimentation, stupidity and confusion than the first half of the twentieth century. We have outdone all past ages in sheer murder. Never has man been so badly led and so madly marshalled to dull apathy and self-destruction. And, in spite of that, we are quite proud of ourselves! An intelligent lot we think we are! And the process continues. Alter a letter and call it progress. Progress to what? If my man is a poor stick, his background is an array of ugly bludgeons. Could he escape their pressures and menaces?

In the last fifteen years, poverty has been greatly alleviated in the more prosperous countries: and much more has been done – quite another thing – to encourage the accumulation of possessions. Alleviation of poverty is a must for humanity, but accumulation of wealth raises two questions. First, should the peoples of the West (or, for that matter, of the Soviet Union) have man-per-head automobiles, television sets, council houses and the rest, while the peoples of the East live at starvation level? Secondly, how far can what is called (though never with precision) the ‘standard of life’ be raised in prosperous countries without damage to the rest of the world, and perhaps even to the people concerned? Wealth, if not wisely used, becomes meaningless squander. Man is an adaptable creature: as most of us have seen, he can be surprisingly cheerful under conditions of war, bombardment, boredom, frustration, hardship and loss. To link happiness with physical comfort and possessions may be a mistake: Sparta had a word for it. A manual labourer of 1960, put down among the fine flower of Elizabethan aristocracy in 1560, would be revolted by the dirt, the stink, the manners and the general savagery: yet who will dare to say that the Elizabethans were less happy, or less gifted, than we? A quarter of a century ago Mr Rajagopalachari, then Prime Minister of Madras, said to me in an interview which I wrote down at the time: ‘The gospel of more and more will ruin the West.’ I saw what he meant. But, since then, the gospel of more and more has infected the world. The gospel has its point: like drinking, gambling, or fornication it’s fairly harmless when not obsessive. The trouble is that all the forces of government, advertisement, insurance, entertainment, and nationalism are busy turning it into an obsession. You’ve never had it so good. Jesus wept. Not because Mr Macmillan was wrong, but because man does not, oddly enough, live happily by bread alone.

In his two or three thousand years of what we may, possibly, call intelligent life, man has not yet discovered how to govern himself. Or, to put it in another way, he does not, in the long run, wish to be governed by other men. He wants a god or gods (sometimes taking human shape), and nothing else will do. As a result, all human government tends to break down. Democracy is a good idea, if only because it keeps on, apparently, shuffling the governors: you can’t be a god for too long. But it is also a bad idea, because the pack gets dog-eared from continual shuffling. A joker turns up and disrupts the game. Who’s at fault. Don’t tell me that it’s economic conditions or slumps or the high

cost of living. It's man. Man creates his own conditions. The gods must double themselves up with laughter at the mess[•] he makes of them. Just look down for a moment, my dear Jupiter, at all those people crammed in cars on the Brighton road, with nothing better to do. They never had it so good.

Our solemn fact-finders can impress us, no doubt. Over-population can be dressed up as a nightmare, and the insistence on cannonfodder in the service of nationalism, or unrestrained breeding sanctified by religion, is neither pretty nor sensible: still, who can tell whether human beings will not contrive to live in mile-high skyscrapers and get food from air or sea? Man, if he wishes to live in crowds and produce endless children, can do so for some time to come. Man's desires create the facts. If men desire nationalism and flag-wagging and the defence of their soil, then of course they cannot solve unemployment, they cannot get rid of high tariffs and backward areas, and they will certainly have war. If men desire power over others, propaganda, subversion and corruption will come along too. If men desire money, plutocracy will be there. If men desire to move in crowds, they will get stultifying bureaucracy or the dictator. If men desire too high a standard of living, they will depress the living standards of others. I don't see how any political sophistry can get over these ineluctable facts. But the desires of men, at this time, may move in a blind circle and automatically, so far as human *prosperity* is concerned, create a zero. You struggle for a rise in salary, get it, and find that prices have risen accordingly. Also you have priced yourself out of the market, and your goods no longer sell. Whether such things have anything to do with human *happiness* is surely questionable.

It is said that it will all be the same in a hundred years or that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. It might be truer to say that human nature changes very little, if indeed at all in our short period of history: but that the human condition does change drastically, and, in doing so, alters the scale of human values and thus makes history. Religion, art, scholarship, money, power, physical beauty, athletics, sport, nationalism, space-travel, war, peace: such stars glitter in the skies of time, and the human generations passing beneath follow one or another. The Greeks aimed at beauty, intellect, heroism, glamorous gods: the Romans concentrated on power and order and law: Italy of the Renaissance mixed art and religion in a splendid brew. Greed,[•] said President

[•] Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, p.27.

Truman in 1946, seems to be the keynote nowadays. That may be too harsh. We live in an age of bodily comfort, money-worship, speed and sport. They can logically be defended, but, as top values, they exclude others.

The greatest changes which have occurred in my lifetime (in human society, not in science, which is another story) are undoubtedly the growth of crowds, and the growth of interference by the State in the life of the individual: perhaps two sides of the same penny. Not a penny that pleases me. Among other changes, pride of place for the Ugliest Duckling goes to the spread of advertisement, defiling cities and country with its bad taste and lies: close runners-up are universal suffrage, fanatical nationalism, and the loss of religious belief. Might one dare to suggest that advertisement serves no useful purpose at all, and that people would be much happier without it? Could one venture a theory that when illiterate people vote (as they do in India and Africa) for pictures of elephants, bicycles, and sewing-machines, Democracy looks fairly silly, and that even our own voters, choosing one of two faces produced by a party, are not much more literate in the complex business of government? Is it permissible to think that nationalism and patriotism are as dead as last year's raspberries in a world which communications must unite, and that their resurgence anywhere is a danger signal? And as for religion, even if it's no more than the opium of the people (and nobody can prove that), surely a little opium may be good for a universal stomach ache?

But to return to my penny. To interfere has always been a strong urge of human nature. We all interfere: missionaries, politicians, doctors, scientists, reformers, advertisers, imperialists, communists, husbands, wives, parents, teachers: interference passes as a kind of virtue. But is it? The new fact of our times is that the ability to interfere has been strengthened as never before. The conquerors of old interfered with only small bits of humanity: now almost any fool with a microphone can interfere with the lot. No individual today has the privacy or liberty that once were his: you must fill up the income-tax return, the passport, the identity card, the insurance policy: you are safely registered for whatever any Government has a mind to do with you. John Stuart Mill wrote, a hundred years ago: A State which dwarfs its men, in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands — *even for beneficial purposes* — will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished. Men permit

interference, because they are *foxed* by propaganda and crowd emotions, and perhaps above all because they continue to think that the spot on which they happen to be born is more sacred than any other.

Crowds of today's dimensions and ubiquity are also new. Not just crowds in the Sportpalast or the Red Square, in front of St Peter's or at a Cup Tie Final: but crowd on roads, on beaches, in trains, in buses, at beauty-spots, in cities, in shops, in hotels, in streets, in parks, in dance-halls, at exhibitions: everywhere the human tide flowing torrentially and, like a rising torrent, potentially dangerous. Crowds asphyxiate individuality: crowds are malleable mindless monsters, sometimes a flock of obedient sheep, sometimes a pack of angry wolves. Crowds are the paradise of the interferer. Crowds may be the herd of swine which run violently down a steep place into the sea, and perish. But, when Jesus had the temerity to say so, he was besought by the people to depart out of their coasts: even that small crowd resented it. The almighty mob brooks no argument. But gregarious man is mindless man. Crowds can menace intellect, truth, and beauty. So must Marcus Aurelius have felt, turning away in disgust from the bloodthirsty crowd that filled the Colosseum. So also Hadrian, when he built himself into angry solitude at Tivoli.

It is of course fatally easy to be a *bourpuss*. If I pick on crowds and interference, it is because they seem to represent a longterm tendency towards the regimented ant-heap, giving to political and military leaders, who are not much wiser than other men, powers of compulsion which the fully free individual would never concede. The essential leaven of individual variety, even of individual kindness and tolerance, may be swept away by mass emotions, conditioned and controlled by the technical power of communications. What individual amongst us, untouched by mass hysteria and patriotic slogans, would have himself deliberately opted for the four-year Kaiser, or six-year Hitler, war? Not one in a thousand. Yet lack of foresight made both inevitable. Are we better off today? We are more frightened: but the aim of the present race continues, because material possessions must be defended: wealth, security of wealth, economic planning for wealth's security, are ultimate aims. Christ had a different view when he said: The Kingdom of God cometh not *with observation*, neither shall they say 'Lo *here*,' or 'Lo *there*.' The Kingdom of God is *within you*. I take that to mean that the individual must

work out his own salvation, irrespective of the shouts, appeals, threats or promises addressed to him.

My own experience, which for all I know may be a lying jade, suggests that there is hardly a man or woman alive who does not have a natural bent for *something*. The difficulty is first to discover it and then to follow it. Comparatively few people do either. I myself, as you have seen, dismally failed in spite of great advantages. What small talents I possessed were fitted for small things. I was comically unfitted to be a soldier, an administrator, a reformer, a civil servant, or a member of any hierarchical institution. Social pressures, world events, and my own weakness and ignorance, pushed me into such activities, but, since my enthusiasm was never quite fired, I slid from one to another, not quite discontented yet never dedicated. And therefore, naturally, apt to be quarrelsome. But the man or woman who is dedicated to a congenial activity (or even inactivity, as socially judged) has neither the time nor the desire to quarrel. Strikers who strike for money are striking only to escape from boring jobs. Peace becomes monotonous, and quarrelling attractive, to millions of men, simply because they are condemned to a dull routine. To rush into a cinema or gape at television after a day in the factory is not, whatever anyone may say, a satisfactory way of life.

This, I would think, is the greatest challenge which faces our industrial age. Not only because machines are dull things to work with day by day, but also because automation will release leisure to millions who have been conditioned not to use it. The massive myth that human beings must always be busy dies hard: it survives only because people are afraid of leisure and of the growing terror of nothing to think about. Yet, if people refuse to think, and want even leisure organised for them, we are certainly for the dark. The talks and treaties about peace and disarmament which have been trickling on for forty years now, have had small effect; peace cannot be forcibly imposed from above, it must be built on a foundation of human happiness, intelligence, and toleration. Our world cries out for a clean, a revolutionary, sweep of educational methods: even of the damnable word education. The fusty old ideas of schoolhouses with mobs of bored children marshalled by underpaid teachers to climb ladders of parrot examinations based on biased textbooks are out-of-date. We need instead – perhaps: I am drawing a bow at a venture – some free and lively movement of young, very young, people all over the globe, not herded, not marshalled, linguistically literate as young

folk can so easily be, seeing for themselves not one dim parochial corner of 'national' territory but the whole vast field of man's endeavour, learning to live easily in one world. Some such design, easily accomplished with a tenth of the money we spend on armaments, might free millions to follow their natural bent and do more than any summit conference to make the world secure.

November mists begin to steal across the valley. Here on the piazzale in front of my little house, I look over a view as beautiful, I think, as any that our world can offer. At my feet lies Mister, last of a long line of bulldogs, enchanting companions of my life. If Mister could read and laugh, I am sure that he would laugh at these muddy reflections of mine. 'Warmth, food, sleep,' he would say, 'some sex and a little fighting: that's life: why worry about what you don't understand?' The garden, with cypress and pine, mimosa and oleander, tumbles away to the fertile plain, where the river Serchio meanders through lush meadows: beyond rise the craggy majesties of the Apuan Alps. Above them the sky is serene, green-tinted, deep as eternity: the evening star glitters solitary in its vast expanse. The sky has something to say to us, perhaps: men have always connected it with their dreams of gods, of heaven, of immortality. What have the apparently intractable problems of earth's little inhabitants to do with that serenity?

*A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency.
How it were good to sink there, and breathe free.
How fair a lot to fill
Is left to each man still.*

